"THE FANTASTIC FOUR"

by

Michael France

Based On The Characters By

Stan Lee & Jack Kirby

REVISED DRAFT

FADE IN:

A VAST, DARK METALLIC ROOM - HIGH ANGLE

The lights are off -- there's just enough light from LEDs on computers to indicate the room's cathedral scale. FOOTSTEPS on the concrete tell us that one man is walking toward a main console --

-- when he hits a switch, the entire room blazes into light to reveal that the man, unrecognizably small in this huge room, stands in the middle of a fifty-foot diameter logo on the floor: a **blue numeral "4"** against a white background, banded by a blue circle. From this angle we MOVE DOWN behind the console --

-- as more lights come on, they reveal an unusually designed track and tunnel that lead out to an unknown point. With the hum of machinery, electromagnets that ring the tunnel fire to life one after the other, in a row of lights travelling backwards to --

THE FF-4 PHOENIX SPACECRAFT

A brand new hybrid of a space shuttle and a high altitude jet, sitting and waiting on the track, also bearing the "4" logo seen on the floor. The quickest way to describe its futuristic, yet realistic appearance: Kirbyesque. The man who designed it is --

REED RICHARDS

who is at the console, wearing a blue flight suit bearing the "4" logo. Reed stares at the ship, thrilled, awed -- every day of his thirty-five years has led up to this one. Behind him, a voice --

SUE (O.S.)
Nice ride.

SUSAN STORM

his fiance and partner, both radiant and smart enough to keep up with Reed, crosses the room. Both are grinning as if they've hit the jackpot -- they can't believe the day they've worked for has finally come. They also, incidentally, look like they're in love.

SUE
Eleven years in research labs -- three prototypes that blew up -- and I don't think anyone knows how many billion dollars --
(reaches him)
-- all for a couple of weeks in space.
(light)
Is it everything you dreamed of?

REED
(eyes locked on ship)
No -- not quite yet --
(takes her hand)
-- now it is.

Sue takes Reed by the chin and turns his face away from the ship and towards her for a kiss -- as we go to --

EXT. OUTSIDE THE OTI COMPLEX - ON A ROOFTOP - THE SUNRISE

breaks over the horizon of the Texas desert -- and a man in a blue flight suit stands at the roof's edge, over a sign with the logo of the "Office For Technical Innovation". He's enjoying the view, and the last two inches of a Churchill length cigar. This is

COMMANDER BEN GRIMM

A large, gruff man in his late thirties who doesn't suffer fools gladly, now trying to get every last bit of pleasure out of a cigar. Ben looks out off the roof, toward the crowd gathered outside the perimeter fence, and raises a pair of binoculars --

BEN'S BINOCULAR POV - SCANNING THE CROWD

Ben is looking for someone in particular -- he ultimately finds a stunning woman, named CARLENE, who has been waiting for this. She smiles, waves, and mouths "I love you" --

ON THE ROOF - BEN

smiles too and waves at her -- this is, along with the cigar, clearly a pre-flight ritual. But it's interrupted when behind him, a young TECHNICIAN moves nervously out from a rooftop doorway. Ben Grimm isn't someone you interrupt casually.

TECHNICIAN
Commander Grimm -- ? Launch time is --

BEN
(simple, cuts him off)
When I say it is.

Unhurried, Ben draws the cigar down to the band, savors the last bit of smoke -- and regretfully stubs it out on the wall.

BEN
Last one for two weeks.
(beat)
Your boss, Richards -- if he's such a genius, how come he can't invent a space station you can <u>smoke</u> in?

TECHNICIAN
(eyes watch)
Uh, Commander --

BEN
Relax, kid. This is my twelfth mission, and I ain't been left behind yet.
(turns for door)
You wanna worry about somebody? Worry about Storm.

As Ben marches toward the door, we CUT TO:

EXT. **JOHNNY STORM IN MOTION** - <u>EXTREME CLOSEUP</u>

All we can see is Johnny's face, eyes shut, as he's kissing a woman we can hardly see -- but the DEAFENING WIND and ROARING ENGINE tell us something's off here -- we pull back to see Johnny is indulging in two of his favorite things at once --

<u>JOHNNY AND A GORGEOUS WOMAN ARE LOCKED IN A KISS</u>

<u>on two seperate motorcycles</u>, tearing down a Texas desert highway at 70 MPH, with Johnny just far enough ahead to allow the kiss. After a long moment, Johnny breaks the kiss and opens his eyes -- as she pulls away, Johnny looks off to a side road coming up --

JOHNNY'S POV - DOWN THE SIDE ROAD - THE OTI COMPLEX BUILDING

which has, like every space launch, a gigantic digital countdown clock set up outside for the public -- it reads **T-MINUS 00:44:00** --

ON THE MOTORCYCLE - JOHNNY

turns to his girlfriend du jour -- both SHOUT over the wind --

JOHNNY
-- Sorry, honey -- but I'm late for work --

GORGEOUS WOMAN
-- Where? --

JOHNNY
Outer space.

Johnny, grinning, effortlessly curves the bike down a side exit --

GORGEOUS WOMAN
(shouts after him)
Will you call me?

Johnny's already gone, speeding toward the OTI complex several miles away, behind some desert mountains. Johnny races down the road, weaving in and out of cars snarled in a spectator traffic jam, missing bumpers with five inch margins at 50 mph -- as --

INSIDE THE LAUNCH AREA - THE FF-4

and its track are being attended to by a team of technicians. Ben, now fully suited up, approaches the ship's open cargo door.

INSIDE THE FF-4 CARGO AREA - REED

triple-checks the cargo. Ben climbs in -- and Reed pointedly locks one of the boxes. There's a tension between these men -- a battle of wills. Simply put, neither one likes to take orders.

BEN
We're T-minus forty minutes -- you finally gonna tell me what's in those crates?

REED
You know the mission protocol. I'll tell you when we get into the station. Not before.

Reed moves away -- but Ben stops him with an arm in his chest.

BEN
Not good enough. I'm used to knowing what I'm carrying on any bird I'm piloting.

REED
I'm sure you're used to a lot of things, Grimm, but I'm in command of this mission --

BEN
Sure. And I'm just the bus driver.
(hot)
I know you're "in charge" today because you designed this boat, and you wouldn't finish building it unless they made you the supreme captain of the universe or something --

BEN
(beat)
-- but remember, you gotta earn the right to give me an order. And, mister, you're a long ways off from that.

Ben climbs out of the cargo bay, and Reed, a little steamed, SLAMS down the box locks a little harder than necessary -- as we go to --

ON A TELEVISION SCREEN - A CNN REPORTER IS STANDING

outside the OTI complex, not far from the mission clock --

REPORTER (TO CAMERA)
This historic launch, to dock with the international space station Orion in orbit above Earth, is a mission of many firsts. It will be the first use of the FF-4 "Phoenix" space plane, piloted by Commander Benjamin Grimm, a veteran of numerous shuttle missions, and the first use of an electromagnetic launch system, created by the Office of Technical Innovation's lead designer, Dr. Reed Richards.

VIDEOTAPE - REED, SUE, JOHNNY, AND BEN AT A PRESS CONFERENCE

Johnny, in aviator sunglasses and clearly relishing the attention, chats silently as the reporter's V.O. continues.

REPORTER (V.O.)
This flight crew also, historically, is something of a family affair: Dr. Susan Storm, last year's recipient of a MacArthur Foundation grant for her breakthroughs in cellular research, is the fiance and partner of Dr. Richards. When it was announced that she was on the crew, Dr. Storm's brother, Air Force Major Johnathan Storm, a test pilot in his own right, volunteered for the mission.

The voice-over pauses as Johnny leans forward with a cocky grin --

JOHNNY (ON TAPE)
Well, somebody's got to look out for my sister.

Off Sue's slow burn -- the video footage abruptly changes to --

AN AIRPLANE EXPLODING IN MID-AIR

one split second after the pilot ejects -- we see footage of two more different plane crashes and near-miss ejections -- as we hear:

REPORTER (V.O.)
Richards reportedly felt Storm earned his seat on the mission by test-piloting all three previous prototypes of the spacecraft.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MISSION PREP ROOM - JOHNNY PUTS ON A FLIGHT SUIT

rapidly zipping and snapping -- and Sue comes in, a little steamed.

SUE
Glad you could make it. I had to cover for you for sneaking out of quarantine.

Johnny ignores this and continues his prep --

JOHNNY
You know, Sue, this might be a little out of your depth. This isn't like the usual test tube stuff you do with the mad professor --

SUE
It's not "test tubes". It's photon data transmission --

JOHNNY
-- Whatever --

SUE
-- and "the mad professor" is going to be your brother-in-law after we get back.

JOHNNY
Don't remind me -- Thanksgivings are going to be a blast from now on.
(beat)
Look, Sue -- I know you don't want to hear it, but all I'm saying is --
(serious)
-- this is outer space we're talking about. A million things can go wrong up there that you are just not trained to deal with.
(beat)
All I'm saying is, if you want to pull out, there's still time.

We see here two people who aren't communicating at all: Johnny is genuinely trying to be protective of his sister, but Sue is reading it as him being a condescending jerk.

SUE
(a little incredulous)
You're right. A lot can go wrong.
(beat)
If you're that nervous, we'll call your alternate.

Sue starts out --

JOHNNY
Sue --

SUE
I've got a responsibility on this flight. Maybe that's out of your depth.

Sue SLAMS out of the prep room -- and Johnny, frustrated that he can't ever get it right with his sister, finishes his prep.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION MISSION CONTROL - DAY

The nerve center of the ground base for the mission, a wall to wall room of futuristic computers and monitors, designed by Reed. Technicians monitor the condition of the craft in one section, the launch track in another, and space station conditions elsewhere.

At the center of it is DR. ERIC MACLEHR: the administrative head of OTI, a man who is second to Reed in all respects -- a fact that clearly rankles him. He picks up the radio mike --

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT - JOHNNY, BEN, REED AND SUE

are strapped in, as the radio comes to life --

MACLEHR (OVER RADIO)
We're at zero-minus forty seconds and counting. Confirm that you're checked through -- over --

BEN
-- Final check through cleared. Actuate ship's electromagnets.

JOHNNY
Check --

Johnny hits the appropriate toggles --

AN ELECTROMAGNET UNDERNEATH THE SHIP ACTIVATES

-- pushing the ship up under a two foot magnetic cushion -- it's now positioned to go into the center of the magnetic coil --

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT - BEN

is running the rest of the sequence for launch --

BEN
Warming up second stage engines --

As the engines start up with an electronic HUM --

OUTSIDE THE COMPLEX - HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE

in cars and camped outside the gates are suddenly silent, watching the countdown clock tick down -- **00:00:10** -- **00:00:09** --

INSIDE MISSION CONTROL - TECHNICIANS

are coolly but quickly working their controls --

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT

Ben eyes the ship's clock -- it's at **00:00:01** and turning over --

BEN
-- run launch sequence -- **now** --

THE TUNNEL'S MAGNETIC COIL ACTIVATES

-- by turning on the magnet closest to the ship -- it's drawn in, slowly at first, like a train pulling away from a station --

-- but as the electromagnetic coil accelerates --

INSIDE FF-4 - FRONT VIEW OUT COCKPIT - **THE COIL**

is activating, faster and faster -- within several seconds, a digital meter on the instrument panel indicates the ship is travelling at 100 mph already and is rapidly climbing --

OUTSIDE THE COMPLEX - THE SPECTATORS

The only noise here is a deep bass RUMBLE from underground -- everyone is pointing to the mountain behind the complex --

As the FF-4 is passing underground, its sonic vibrations are blasting rocks loose like a travelling earthquake --

INSIDE THE FF-4 - THE TRACK

curves upward -- the airspeed indicator shows that they're past 500 mph, and they haven't left the ground yet -- until finally --

AT THE MOUTH OF THE MOUNTAIN TUNNEL - **THE SHIP BLASTS OUT**

like an aerodynamic bullet without fire or smoke, just a deafening **BOOM** as it smashes through the sound barrier and up into orbit --

INSIDE THE COCKPIT - REED

is grimacing against the three-G pull -- Johnny notices his discomfort and is enjoying it a little --

JOHNNY
Relax, Reed -- that's just the first stage.
(flips switches)
This is my favorite part --
(finger pauses on one button)
-- **flame on**!

On that, Johnny punches the "SECOND STAGE BOOST" switch -- and --

THE REAR ROCKETS KICK ON IN AN ENORMOUS FIREBALL

with a deafening **ROAR**, hurtling the ship up into escape velocity --

INSIDE MISSION CONTROL - A STATIC-RIDDEN SCREAM

BLASTS out of a communications speaker -- there's so much sub-orbital static that it's hard to tell what's going on, but it sounds like a scream of agony. MacLehr rushes to the intercom --

MACLEHR
-- Mission Control to Phoenix -- request immediate status report. Is anything wrong?

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT - JOHNNY

is HOWLING like a banshee over the rush of the blastoff -- Ben reaches over and shuts off a microphone in front of Johnny --

BEN (INTO RADIO)
Negative -- all systems go at zero plus forty-four seconds --
(turns to Johnny)
"Flame on"?

Johnny shrugs it off -- and --

THE FF-4 REACHES ESCAPE VELOCITY

shaking off the last of the Earth's atmosphere, tracking through the void of space -- until there's a flareup of light, revealing --

THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION "ORION" IN HIGH ORBIT

The flare came from the huge solar power panels that fan out in all directions on the upper fringe. Beneath these is a spider-like amalgamation of pods and passages built around a central core -- and jutting out like legs beneath it are four docking ports.

The FF-4 flies into view -- and starts the process of coordinating its speed with the station, which is rocketing along on thrusters mounted in the docking ports to maintain its orbital path --

BEN (O.S., RADIO)
-- Phoenix on docking approach -- over --

As the ship tracks parallel to one of the docking ports --

INSIDE FF-4 COCKPIT - BEN

focuses on matching the speed of the ship to the docking port. Instruments in front of him show, to the third decimal point, the relative speeds of ship and station, but this is too high-tech for Ben -- he's just eyeballing it out the window. Ultimately --

THE FF-4 PULLS UNDERNEATH THE DOCKING PORT

and is magnetically drawn towards it to bridge the last several inches -- the top hatch of the plane matches perfectly with the exterior hatch of the docking port. As it finally locks in --

IN THE FF-4 COCKPIT - BEN

hits a toggle, opening the ship's overhead hatch, revealing they're locked under the docking bay's low hatch. Ben reaches up with a metal tool -- in effect, a key that he turns in an oversized keyhole, and the hatch above irises open.

INT. INSIDE A STATION PASSAGEWAY - A MOMENT LATER - REED AND SUE

are at a window, overlooking a momentarily darkened earth -- both of them are exhilarated to be actually, finally, be in space.

REED
(pointing out)
-- you can see it, just starting -- there --

Out the window, an orbital sunrise burns in just under the earth -- a uniquely thrilling sight. But an icy voice breaks in:

VICTOR (O.S.)
It is a magnificent sight, isn't it?

Sue and Reed turn to face

VICTOR OBRETCH

a driven Russian man in his thirties, who is crossing closer to them. He is handsome and brilliant -- and his arrogance about both qualities is masked behind only the thinnest veneer of charm. He looks at the view as appreciatively as Reed --

VICTOR
There are forty-two per day. When you multiply that times the two hundred and twelve days I have been stationed here, I suppose I've seen --

VICTOR
(calculates, smiles)
-- eight thousand, nine hundred and four. But I find each more exhilarating than the last.
(they shake hands)
After exchanging data for the last ten months, it is good to meet you at last -- you must be Reed Richards.

REED
A pleasure -- you must be Victor Obretch.

A voice breaks in from behind Reed:

BEN (O.S.)
And you must be the genius everybody says you are, Richards.

Reed turns -- and Ben emerges from the docking cylinder, with the last of the equipment boxes Reed locked earlier. This one is open.

BEN
One guy in the whole station, and you figure out who he is with brain wattage to spare.
(indicates open latch)
When I was unloading this, the latch "fell" open. Now, I'm no rocket scientist -- but --

Ben reaches into the crate, and the contents float out: it's not some high-tech machinery -- it's a rotten, gnarled, wooden log.

BEN
-- I don't see why this is top secret.

CUT TO:

INT. COMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - REED AND VICTOR

enter, with Johnny, Ben and Sue following right behind. The module is tightly packed with next-generation computers designed by Reed and Victor -- and pride in that shows in Reed's attitude.

As a matter of geography, we see through a porthole where this module is relative to the rest of the station: it's in the center, beneath the solar panels and between the four docking cylinders.

Reed turns on one of the computer screens - it reveals a 3-D model of a molecule's atomic structure.

REED
For years, I've been working on a new branch of science -- nanotechnology. The idea -- and up to now, all it's been is an idea -- is that you can take atoms -- the smallest units of molecules -- and rearrange them any way you like. Into anything you like.

Reed adjusts the screen, showing "MOLECULAR MODEL: WOOD" --

REED
Once we've got it under control, we can change wood --

The molecular model changes structure, and we see that it really is just a matter of rearranging a few parts of the molecule, until it reads "MOLECULAR MODEL: GOLD".

REED
-- into gold. We'll be able to make food out of garbage, or modern buildings out of slums. The most useless thing in the world can be transformed into the most valuable.

Johnny claps Ben on the back --

JOHNNY
Hear that, big guy? There's hope for you yet.

SUE
Someday, we will be able to work on humans. With this technology, we can rebuild cancerous organs from the inside out, or regenerate missing limbs --
(smiles)
-- the only limit is our own imagination.

REED
It's a simple idea, but there are numerous practical problems. It's too slow a process to assemble objects by manipulating atoms one at a time. And there hasn't been a computer powerful enough to process the atomic movement or to power the molecular movement of billions of atoms simultaneously.
(beat)
Then I found out about Victor's research. It turns out that Victor and I were working on the same problem from different angles.

Victor takes over, pointing to a row of computers. Unlike Reed, there is not the slightest shade of modesty in his description.

VICTOR
I created this, originally, to control the entire Soviet defense network. Of course, it is no longer necessary for that purpose.
(proudly)
Dr. Richards will confirm it is the first and only working teraflops computer in the world.

JOHNNY
(rolls his eyes)
Oh. You're right. This is simple.

VICTOR
It can process up to one trillion bits of floating information per second. That makes it more powerful than the five biggest computers on earth combined.

BEN
Well. Ain't you clever.
(turns to Reed)
I know you're not here on account of your sparkling wit -- what'd you bring to class?

CUT TO:

INT. STATION HATCH - VIEW UNDERNEATH

The hatch door irises open, revealing Johnny, Sue and Ben are there with Reed, who is wearing a headset radio and pointing down.

REED
Over the last year, Sue and I designed this equipment and sent it up on shuttle missions.
(beat)
It's called a nanochamber.

BENEATH THEM - **THE NANOCHAMBER**

is an eight foot cylinder of tiny, intricate pinpoint lenses, built into the walls themselves, meshed together above a platform.

REED
This cylinder is lined with hundreds of thousands of blue lasers, each with a bandwidth just narrow enough to individually recast the shapes of molecules.
(into radio)
Run the test program, Victor.

IN THE COMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

activates the nanochamber's control computer -- and --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - **AN INTRICATE MESH OF MICROLASERS ACTIVATE**

-- their blue beams criss-crossing to carve shapes of light in a coordinated, deliberate manner. It looks like a hologram, but the clarity and density of the figures is far beyond that technology.

REED
Every one of those lasers can sculpt more molecules in a millisecond than I could in a lifetime. We can remake the composition of any object within seconds.
(into radio)
All right -- cut the test, Victor.

IN THE PASSAGEWAY ABOVE THE NANOCHAMBER

Reed looks proud and hopeful. Ben, however, looks suspicious.

REED
That's the theory, anyway. Tomorrow we'll see if it'll really work.

BEN
I guess there's a really good reason you couldn't do this down on Earth.

REED
Two, actually. One is that the microgravity environment of the space station will make the assemblies easier -- and the second is --

VICTOR (O.S.)
-- a very minor factor of risk.

Victor arrives, and Ben, his suspicion confirmed, turns to Reed --

BEN
"Risk"?

REED
This is molecular rearrangement on a huge scale -- and the only thing that makes it possible is the computer's speed. That speed gives it an element of unpredictability.

REED
(beat)
It's possible -- barely possible -- that any directed reassembly of molecules could spread in the form of self-replicating micromachines to alter the station's structural integrity.

BEN
In English, I guess that means the whole damn place could fall apart. Or we could get microwaved into little piles of glop.

VICTOR
With this technology? Impossible --

BEN
That's what they said at Chernobyl, Doc. Lemme know when you're done. Meantime, I'll be as far away from this gizmo as possible.

Ben walks away, turning down a corridor corner, leaving everyone a little thrown by his attitude -- and --

DOWN THE CORRIDOR - BEN

keeps walking -- and Johnny runs up behind him for a jab --

JOHNNY
Hey, Grimm --
(catches up)
-- if you spook so easily, why'd you volunteer for this trip?

Ben turns around, poker-faced --

BEN
I didn't. NASA drafted me to go on one last ride to cover for you.
(off Johnny's look)
Seems the brass there thinks you're a hot-stick artist who'll take any risk for a big enough thrill, but that when the real trouble starts you'll fold like an accordion.

JOHNNY
Where'd they get that?

Ben almost -- almost, but not quite -- smiles --

BEN
From the evaluation I wrote when I was your instructor at MacDill.
(turns to walk away)
See you later, kid -- I'm gonna grab some sleep. Don't break anything while I'm gone.

Off Johnny's sore look -- we CUT TO:

INT. COMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - REED AND SUE

install electronic equipment, as Victor angrily stalks in.

VICTOR
It appears that you have been less than direct with me as well, Dr. Richards.

VICTOR
(incensed)
Your ship's manifest shows no notation of the experimental animals I require.

Victor turns on the mainframe computer -- on its monitor, a status line reads **RUNNING BIO-NANO PROGRAM.** As it starts, simulation models flash by with biological tags: **MOLECULAR MODEL: MUSCLE PROTEINS, MOLECULAR MODEL: PLASMA BONDS**, etc.

VICTOR
This is why we came. This is what we worked for. This is what I've spent years designing. With this computer and the models loaded into the program, it can deconstruct, and rapidly reconstruct, any living organism.
(exasperated)
But it is, without test subjects, a meaningless simulation -- your decision has --

Sue calmly, but firmly, steps up to stop Victor's harrangue -- he's been ranting without even noticing she is there.

SUE
Hold it -- Victor -- I decided.
(beat)
Reed brought me into the project to work on the biological problems of nanotech. I went over your program on Earth -- carefully --

Victor eyes her condescendingly -- and turns to Reed --

VICTOR
Does your fiance speak for you as well?

REED
(without hesitation)
Absolutely. Molecular reconstruction of living subjects is far more complicated than that of inanimate materials. Your base math formula for the reconstruction process --
(shakes her head)
-- it's got too many random factors. There's no way to tell what you'd wind up with.

Victor hits the keyboard again -- accelerating the program so that the molecular models flash by at an incomprehensible speed.

VICTOR
That is precisely the point.
(indicates screen)
With each cycle, the randomness will work with the organism, and adapt with it, like natural evolution. But instead of taking one million years, this can be done in seconds.

SUE
Maybe. But with the anomalies I saw, it would be irresponsible and reckless to --

VICTOR
We are on the threshold of redefining the nature of life itself -- this is no time to be timid.

SUE
Wrong. It's exactly the time. This is too important for us to get it wrong.

Reed steps in before it gets too heated, facing Victor --

REED
Look -- we still have to make sure the nanochamber will build inanimate objects. If it does, we'll work on your figures for a future mission. All right?

VICTOR
As you wish. You settled the matter, in any case, by denying me experimental subjects.

Victor angrily stalks out past Reed and Sue -- winding up in --

INT. SPACE STATION - VICTOR'S QUARTERS

are the featureless, mechanized womb you'd expect him to live in. Victor enters, fuming, and turns on a computer work station mounted on a wall. As he furiously taps into the keyboard --

-- the screen reads: **STATION MAIN CONTROL SYSTEM - ENTERING PROGRAM**. As Victor continues working, driven, we --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION MISSION CONTROL - DAY

The flight controller is on the radio -- the team of technicians is at their respective consoles, monitoring operations.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (INTO RADIO)
Good morning, Orion. We hate to wake you up with bad news, but --

INT. SPACE STATION - REED AND SUE'S QUARTERS

Reed, who has clearly been up for some time, is looking out the porthole at the stars -- he reaches across to turn the speaker down before it can wake Sue, who is still asleep.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (OVER RADIO)
-- our main computer's found a malfunctioning part on guidance thruster number three --

IN ANOTHER PART OF THE SPACE STATION - THE GALLEY

Johnny and Ben are having breakfast: Johnny is sipping coffee from a sealed, zero-gravity "mug", while Ben is unsuccessfully trying to tear the plastic open on some kind of breakfast brick.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (OVER RADIO)
-- you need to get that fixed as soon as possible, or you'll be pushed into an incorrect orbit pattern -- over --

REED (OVER RADIO)
Copy, mission control -- we'll repair ASAP.

BEN
Sounds like your morning's mapped out, kid.

JOHNNY
(lightly)
Oh, no no no -- remember, we're equally ranked in this box, Grimster. Tell you what --
(reaches into zipper pocket)
-- instead of using my pull with my brother-in-law -- I mean, our commander -- I'll flip you for it.

Johnny pulls out a coin and flips it up -- but in the reduced gravity, it hangs in place, spinning endlessly. It looks like it could go on for half an hour. Johnny nonchalantly turns to Ben --

JOHNNY
Well? You going to call it or not?

Ben tosses his breakfast bar up, and pushes away from the table.

BEN
Ahh, forget it -- if I don't get out of this box for an hour, I'll wind up nuttier than the Frankenstein twins.
(starts out)
I'm going to suit up. See you in twenty.

Ben walks out, and Johnny absently flicks the coin to spin it horizontally instead of vertically -- as we CUT TO --

INT. NANOCOMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - REED

enters to find Victor is already there. His manner is oddly friendly, as if they'd had no disagreement at all.

VICTOR
Ah -- good morning, Dr. Richards.

REED
Good morning.

Victor turns on the system: a camera monitor shows the log has been placed in the nanochamber, while a bank of computer monitors show that the status of the construction is **AWAITING COMMAND.**

THE PORTHOLE VIEW OF EARTH

is breathtaking: the blue oceans and white clouds are backlit from behind by the sun. Victor looks out thoughtfully --

VICTOR
It was unthinkable, just a few years ago, that we could share the same view of creation held only by God. Now it is commonplace.
(beat)
It was just as unthinkable, until today, that we could overtake God's control of creation itself. But that is precisely what we will achieve today.

Reed is visibly uncomfortable with this talk -- while Victor is obviously quite anxious to be on an equal footing with God.

VICTOR
A historic day like this is no time for false modesty, Richards. You became a scientist for the same reason I did -- to bring a vision of order to the chaos of the world. To recreate it in your own image.

REED
Every scientist does.
(shifting away from this)
But before we start composing our Nobel acceptance speeches, I think we'd better see if this thing works, all right?
(hits controls)
First test cycle -- starting now --

The control computer hums to life -- and --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - **THE BLUE LASER MESH ACTIVATES**

in a rising spiral of one hundred thousand beams around the log, floating weightlessly -- a blaze of photonic sparks envelop it --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR AND REED WATCH ANXIOUSLY

as the camera monitor shows a blinding display of color -- until the control computer BEEPS, indicating that it's done.

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - **A GLEAMING SHAFT OF PERFECT STEEL**

has been formed from the raw material of the log.

INSIDE THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR AND REED

are awed and speechless -- one computer screen shows the line **LASER ANALYSIS OF MOLECULAR COMPOSTION: STEEL.**

OUTSIDE THE STATION - **UNDER THE GIRDER FRAMEWORK** - BEN

crawls around the outside of the upper part of the station -- his life-support systems are self-contained, but he has a lifeline tethering him to the station's top. As he heads for a thruster --

BEN (OVER RADIO)
Confirm fuel for thruster three is off --

INSIDE CENTRAL CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY

is working with Ben, all business for a change --

BEN (OVER RADIO)
-- if the hydrogen kicks in while I'm changing the part, I'm going to wind up as "Comet Benjamin" -- over --

JOHNNY (INTO RADIO)
Sounds like fun.
(taps computer keys)
Hydrogen supply negative.

The computer screen shows a graphic of the station, with the line **HYDROGEN SUPPLY 0% THRUSTER THREE** -- but --

INSIDE VICTOR'S QUARTERS - THE COMPUTER

is running a preset program -- **STATION CONTROL BYPASSED. THRUSTER THREE HYDROGEN SUPPLY REACTIVATES 100% IN 120 SECONDS --**

IN NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

is turned away from Reed, looking at a monitor that shows the same line. It's clear that whatever's happening here is his doing. It's clear too from a torn, guilty look that he whatever he's plotted, he isn't one hundred percent committed to yet. Meanwhile --

Reed is breathlessly checking the nanochamber's monitors: a screen's legend and bar-graph tells us "**SECOND CYCLE - COMPLETED**". Reed excitedly points to a computer analysis screen --

REED
The second cycle is rebuilding it again -- the steel's changing into a ceramic compound stronger than any metal in existance -- and that compound never existed anywhere before, except as a molecular theory. Do you realize what this means? Anything that can be imagined can go directly from the design stage to reality with this device.
(almost overcome)
There's no limit to it.

VICTOR
No. No limit at all.

Victor turns away to surreptitiously look at the side screen --

CLOSE ON COMPUTER SCREEN

-- it reads **THRUSTER THREE HYDROGEN SUPPLY REACTIVATING AT 100%** --

OUTSIDE THE SPACE STATION - BEN

works to get the case off the thruster, POUNDING it with a tool --

INSIDE CENTRAL CONSOLE - JOHNNY

hears a WARNING BEEP from the screen -- he looks down, alarmed, because it's just now showing that hydrogen's back on --

JOHNNY
Shit -- Ben -- the hydrogen's been --

OUTSIDE SPACE STATION - CLOSE ON BEN'S HELMET

-- In the visor glass, we see the reflection of Ben's hand completing the downward swing -- and Ben's too-late realization --

JOHNNY (OVER RADIO)
-- reactivated --

On that word, Ben completes the swing -- the tool connects -- and there must be a spark inside the housing, because

THE HOUSING BLASTS APART IN AN EXPLOSION

that both devastating and silent -- Ben is hurled backwards, end over end -- his lifeline is severed at its base, trailing him uselessly. Nothing can stop him from permanent orbit -- until --

-- Ben **collides with the girder framework** -- his body SMASHES against it, and his lifeline tangles in the framework --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

-- Ben audiably GASPS for air, in shock from the blast as bits of debris fly past him -- he's also determined to get back in. But --

THRUSTER THREE'S HOUSING LETS LOOSE ANOTHER EXPLOSION

as powerful as the last blast -- it **structurally weakens the girder framework** -- the array **bends in half and clearly will break**, dangling by one twisted beam, 245 miles over Earth --

-- and the half that's going to break off into space is the half **that has Ben tethered to it** -- meanwhile --

INSIDE ANOTHER EXPERIMENTAL MODULE - SUE

is in front of a monitor, linked to an enlarged microscope -- according to the monitor, she's working on an experiment dealing with "**MICROGRAVITY EFFECTS ON HUMAN PLASMA CELLULAR DIVISION**" --

-- but with the shock of the explosion, she gets up quickly --

INSIDE THE STATION CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY

looks at the monitors showing Ben's predicament -- the lights in the station are blinking out, the computers are unresponsive, and one screen showing a list of all the hatches in the station has a "STATUS" line after each of them reading "**LOCKED**". In other words, no one can possibly get to Ben in time to help. Meanwhile --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - REED

looks out the porthole and sees what's happened to Ben --

REED
My God -- he'll be dragged off --

Victor, meanwhile, looks down at his screen which monitors the program he's fed into the station's control system -- it reads:

ALL ELECTRICAL POWER ROUTED TO NANOSYSTEM

AWAITING COMMAND

INSIDE THE DANGLING GIRDERS - BEN

is climbing up the framework as quickly as he can, but he also has to be careful, as the girder framework is **twisting**: it's being dragged along by the orbital track of the station, hanging by two bent metallic threads that could snap at any moment.

Ben crawls up the girders inch by inch, climbing his own lifeline, which is tangled in the girders near the break -- he's almost up to the break, and the nearest part of the station. Ben reaches for the snag -- he's not going anywhere until this is loosened -- but not only is it ensnarled, a piece of metal has crunched down on it.

Ben yanks the line as hard as he can -- to no effect -- just as --

ONE OF THE TWO METAL STRANDS HOLDING THE FRAMEWORK ON BREAKS OFF

-- the girders twist, knocking Ben out of the framework -- **the framework is dangling more precariously and twisting** -- **while Ben is hanging, powerless, from his lifeline** --

BEN'S HELMET POV - THE EARTH

is far below -- the void of space is all around him --

BEN CLIMBS UP THE LIFELINE TOWARD THE GIRDER FRAMEWORK

which is whipped around by the station, each twist it takes weakening the support -- Ben reaches the framework, just as --

THE GIRDER FRAMEWORK TEARS COMPLETELY FREE OF THE STATION

and floats past it -- Ben grips the framework's edge and sees --

BEN'S HELMET POV - DOCKING MODULE FOUR

is coming up fast, the only corner of the station within reach -- if he can't grab it, he's going to be in permanent orbit --

ON THE GIRDERS

which are tossing in rotation and moving away fast -- Ben's got just one choice -- he climbs to the top edge of the girders, and as it passes underneath the bottom of the docking module --

-- **Ben leaps toward the module bottom, his lifeline dragged after him as the girders irrevocably go by** -- Ben has to reach the module bottom before the girders he's tethered to drag him away --

VIEW DOWN FROM DOCKING MODULE FOUR - BEN

hits the module's edge roughly -- there's nothing to hold onto -- Ben's tether goes taut, **dragging him off** -- but Ben finally grabs a hatch railing under the module as tightly as he can -- meaning

THE GIRDERS DRAG BEHIND THE STATION FROM BEN'S TETHER

-- all that holds the ton of metal is the line, and Ben's grip --

VIEW DOWN FROM DOCKING MODULE FOUR - BEN

grimaces with the effort, his grip slipping -- but --

THE LIFELINE TEARS OUT OF BEN'S SUIT

and the girder framework falls away, leaving Ben hanging on the outside of the ship -- to make matters worse --

-- his lifeline **pops** out of his suit -- it starts **decompressing** --

BEN

knows how many different kinds of trouble he's in -- without the suit, he's dead in thirty seconds. With one hand awkwardly gripping the station, as he's battered by small debris shooting past, he reaches out to hit a **EMERGENCY HATCH ENTRANCE** button --

-- Ben hits it -- and hits it again -- with no response.

IN STATION CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY AND SUE

Sue has arrived, and Johnny steps back to let Sue take over on the system -- she's frantically trying to get the computers to work. But one of the screens showing a diagram of the station tells us, visually and verbally, "**ACCESS TO DOCKING MODULE FOUR BLOCKED**" --

JOHNNY
Do something -- he's stuck out there!

SUE
I can't -- All the hatches to that module are sealed, and the circuits aren't responding --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - BEN

hits the button again, to no effect -- his face shows his fear, his frustration, and the physical effects of his decompression --

Ben stops hitting the button -- there's no point. Next to it is the same simple, oversized keyhole we saw Ben use to open a hatch earlier. Problem is, Ben has no simple, oversized key -- unless --

-- Ben looks at the girder debris battering him -- it's different sized metal shards, coming out of Thruster Three. Ben eyes them carefully, and snatches one out of the void as it goes by --

-- Ben takes the "key", awkwardly forces it into the lock, and it turns -- the hatch irises open, and Ben drags himself in -- as --

IN THE STATION CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY AND SUE

Sue's still trying to get control, but the system is unresonsive --

SUE
All the station's power's being cut off --

JOHNNY
(points to screen)
Not quite -- your boyfriend's tanning booth is running, and Ben's gonna roast in it.

Johnny shoves away from the control console, and starts running down the station -- Sue shouts after him --

SUE
You can't get through to him!

JOHNNY
(shouting back)
Not from the inside I can't --

A HORIZONTAL PASSAGEWAY - JOHNNY RUNS

through the passage as quickly as he can, reaching a vertical docking shaft -- Johnny dives into it -- and into --

THE OPEN COCKPIT OF THE PHOENIX

where Johnny starts powering up the ship -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - REED

is looking with horror at Ben's predicament --

REED
He's stuck in there -- shut everything down --

CLOSE ON VICTOR'S FACE

as he hesitates over the keyboard, held back by the last bit of human compassion. But his better instincts fail him -- and in spite of the transformation that will soon follow, this is Victor's defining moment. This is the moment that Victor decides to commit murder in the name of science. Victor hits "ENTER" --

THE NANOCOMPUTER REACTIVATES

with a monitor screen showing: **BIO-NANO PROGRAM: ACTIVE** --

CLOSE ON REED'S HORRIFIED FACE

-- this is the very last thing he wanted to happen: the machine he thought would change the world into a paradise is killing a man --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - BEN

is, to put it mildly, also upset -- he hears the HUMMING of the machine, and he jumps up to SLAM against the top hatch, but it's useless, especially considering he's weightless -- he lands, as --

-- **the blue laser mesh starts cycling upward from his feet** -- as --

OUTSIDE THE DOCKING PORT - THE PHOENIX

disconnects from the docking port -- its engines ignite --

INSIDE THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - REED

is frantically trying to work the computer controls -- but they're locked in and unresponsive. Reed looks at the screen, aghast --

REED
It's running the biological program -- there's no telling what'll happen to him --

VICTOR
Precisely.

Reed looks at Victor, stunned, realizing what he's done. But Victor's expression is as conspiratorial as it is excited -- he seems certain that Reed will go along with this willingly.

VICTOR
Let the program run its course, Dr. Richards. The greatest advances in scientific history have occurred through such "accidents". The advance we are achieving today for humanity is simply beyond calculation.
(sees Reed isn't buying)
No one will ever know what we've done --

REED
I'll know. You've got to turn it off --

Victor seems disappointed that Reed can't see it.

VICTOR
The controls are locked in -- and in any event, the process is reversible --

REED
Good thing you're sure, since you bet his life on it --
(angry)
I'm getting him out before it's too late.

Reed runs down the corridor, leaving Victor behind --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - BEN IS CAUGHT IN THE LASER MESH

swirling around his body -- in the blinding atomic glow, only Ben's struggling silhoette is visible -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

stares with fascination, and a surge of power, at the transformation -- the monitor tracks Ben's transformation: **CYCLE NINE - COMPLETE. MOLECULAR COMPOSITION: UNKNOWN --**

IN A STATION CORRIDOR - REED

runs up to a sealed hatchway leading toward the chamber -- he tries the opening mechanism, which doesn't work. Reed takes out a screwdriver to work on the controls, as Sue runs up behind him --

ON EARTH - IN MISSION CONTROL

Technicians frantically monitor their consoles amid panicked crosstalk, as MacLehr stalks over to the ashen controller.

MACLEHR
What? What's going on up there?

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
Their guidance thrusters -- they were set to overcompensate for the one that was out --
(beat)
-- it's going to push them into a low orbit.

MACLEHR
How low?

The only answer he can manage is a stunned, grim look --

VIEW OF STATION - GUIDANCE THRUSTERS FIRE OUT OF CONTROL

and are **pushing the station down in a lopsided spiral**, making it harder for the Phoenix to match the course to dock -- but --

INSIDE PHOENIX - JOHNNY

finally gets under the module, and magnetically clamps onto the hatch. As it engages, Johnny opens the overhead hatch -- and --

INSIDE NANOCHAMBER - THE BOTTOM HATCH

underneath Ben opens -- and Johnny's hand shoots up, grabbing Ben's ankle to pull him down and out of the laser mesh.

INSIDE PHOENIX - A DAZED BEN

is dragged down into the seat by Johnny -- as --

ON TOP OF THE STATION - AN UPPER THRUSTER EXPLODES

in a silent, gaseous fireball that tears off a docking module --

IN THE STATION CORRIDOR - REED

shorts the controls with a screwdriver and forces open the hatch --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

looks at this, upset because it's all slipping away --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (THROUGH INTERCOM)
Control to Orion -- lateral thrusters are out of control, and guidance is at one hundred percent failure -- evacuate immediately --

Victor doesn't see the monitor reading **COOLANT FAILURE CRITICAL** -- the computer is running too hot --

IN THE STATION CORRIDOR - REED AND SUE RUN

as the corridor tilts from the out-of-control thrusters, and bends from structural stress. They finally reach the top hatch for the vertical shaft leading down to the Phoenix -- and --

REED'S POV THROUGH PORTHOLE GLASS - THE LASER MESH

is active -- he can see the open cockpit, and Johnny waiting there, but he and Sue would have to dive through the molecular blender to get to it. Before Reed has time to ponder that one --

INSIDE THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - THE COMPUTER'S COOLANT SYSTEM

overheats -- the tanks **explode into Victor's face**, hurling him back. The computer isn't hurt, but its power cuts out -- so --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - THE LASER MESH

has stopped dead --

INSIDE THE PHOENIX - JOHNNY

looks up and sees the laser mesh has cleared -- he jumps up into the chamber, with a key for manual hatch opening --

AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HATCH - REED AND SUE

look down as Johnny comes up to open the hatch -- Reed stands up --

REED
Get in the ship -- I'm going to find Victor.

SUE
Reed -- there's no time --

REED
(already gone)
We can't leave him behind --

Reed runs down the corridor, which is rapidly filling with smoke, and is sparking from spreading electrical fires --

-- and after turning a corner, Reed stops -- a tank venting flammable gas shoots a jet of flame across, blocking the corridor.

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - THE NANOCOMPUTER

displays a line reading **SYSTEM POWER REROUTED FROM ALTERNATE SUPPLY - SYSTEM REBOOTING --**

BY THE HATCH OVER THE NANOCOMPUTER - JOHNNY

finally forces the hatch open manually --

JOHNNY
Come on!

Johnny pulls at Sue, but she won't budge -- she's looking back through the flames and smoke --

SUE
Not without Reed --

Johnny climbs up through the hatch --

JOHNNY
He'll make it back, but we have to go now --

Johnny forcefully pushes her down into the nanochamber -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - THE COMPUTER

reboots and reactivates with the line **BIO-NANO PROGRAM RUNNING** --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - THE LASER MESH REACTIVATES

around Sue as she is shoved through by Johnny -- as the laser mesh **cycles around Sue, she is lost in a glowing matrix of light** --

AT THE HATCH - JOHNNY LOOKS DOWN IN HORROR

at his sister's deconstruction -- he dives down into the chamber --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - JOHNNY'S DIVE PUSHES SUE DOWN

out of the laser mesh and into the ship -- the force of his dive, combined with his weightlessness, causes him to collide against the walls of the nanochamber. As he's momentarily stuck there, the system **starts a different cycle, as Johnny's body is reconstructed by the laser matrix** -- as --

IN THE STATION CORRIDOR - REED

can't get to Victor -- an explosion surges a fireball through the corridor. Sure that he must be dead, Reed turns to run back --

-- just as Victor stumbles out of the smoke and flame, his body charred, his hand held to his face, hiding it from view -- as --

ON THE TOP SIDE OF THE HATCH - REED

looks down at the still-running laser matrix, as the station rocks with another explosion. There's no hope of getting off the station any other way -- with no alternative, Reed has to dive down --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - REED DIVES THROUGH THE MATRIX

which cycles around his body even as he dives through it --

IN THE PHOENIX - REED PULLS HIMSELF IN

as Johnny and Ben, both dazed, do a very quick pre-flight --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - THE PHOENIX

drops away as another **blast** tears off another of the docking modules -- wreckage hurtles toward the ship and collides with it, but the thrusters fire and the ship blasts away -- as --

INSIDE THE STATION - AT A PORTHOLE - VICTOR

is wounded, and burned, still clutching his face -- and he can see the tail end of the departing ship, marooning him. Victor screams with a voice as scarred as his face must be --

VICTOR
-- **noooooooooooo** --

As his scream continues, another BLAST rocks what's left of the station, tilting the corridor -- Victor is thrown from his feet --

-- and starts sliding toward the open hatch, toward the blue glow of the still-running nanochamber --

-- Victor desperately tries to brake himself, but **falls into the nanochamber** alongside loose metal debris from the station --

VIEW OVER NANOCHAMBER - **VICTOR IS IN THE LASER MATRIX**

thrashing in a glowing silhoette -- as --

OUTSIDE - THE STATION

or what's left of it are hurtling toward one corner of the globe --

-- and we can see the Phoenix is bulleting down toward another, sparking as it enters the upper atmosphere --

INSIDE THE PHOENIX

The ship is shaking to pieces, forcing Ben and Johnny to struggle with the controls -- what's worse is the ship is getting hotter --

BEN
Our re-entry angle's too steep -- we're gonna cook if we don't level out --

JOHNNY
(on edge of panic)
The heat shield's loose -- what'll we do?

ANGLE ON THE PHOENIX - THE SHIP'S NOSE

is turning white hot with the flawed re-entry -- as --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - THE NANOCHAMBER

is also entering the atmosphere, in a shower of sparks --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - THE TOP INDICATORS

show that the electricity here has both the bio-nano **and** mechanical nano programs running **simultaneously** --

Victor, rigid, is being crafted into some hybrid of man and machine -- as he struggles against his own rebirth, he SCREAMS --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE SCREAM

is heard over the radio -- and all inside realize, with horror --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
Obretch is still alive in there --
(grabs radio)
-- Orion Station -- do you read me --

IN SPACE - **THE STATION ENTERS THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE**

-- the glowing, white hot exterior is surrounded by fire -- as --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - CLOSE ON VICTOR'S HAND

through the ongoing blue laser dance -- there is a metallic, reflective glint as molecules of metal form around his skin, **forming a hybrid of skin and steel** --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (ON INTERCOM)
-- Orion Station -- what is your status? --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE FLIGHT CONTROLLER

is hunched over the radio, sweating --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
-- please ans --

VICTOR (OVER RADIO)
-- You have betrayed me. --

The voice cuts through the room like an ice-cold razor -- it now sounds metallic, and soulless --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - VICTOR'S NEW METALLIC SHAPE

can only vaguely be seen. The matrix is off, and the only light is the blinding strobe of re-entry flames outside the porthole -- but we can hear that the metallic timbre of his voice is not radio distortion, but is now an actual **part** of it --

VICTOR
I have been abandoned by Richards -- I have been condemned by the world that sent me --
(beat)
-- and yet I live.
(growing in intensity)
Carnage shall be your reward -- and **damnation** shall be your heritage.
(angry)
Soon, you shall pray to **me** for a final **annihilation** that I will not grant --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE TECHNICIANS

listen, chilled less by Victor's metallic voice and his malediction, than by the certainty that he's dying --

VICTOR (OVER RADIO)
-- I shall be your **doom** --

The final words echo throughout, until the transmission cuts off --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
Poor bastard --

MACLEHR
(unmoved)
Yeah -- that's tough talk for a guy who just became part of the ozone layer --
(grabs radio)
-- Come in, Phoenix -- what's your status --

INSIDE PHOENIX - WINDSHIELD POV - **RE-ENTRY FLAMES**

swirl around the nose -- the ship's front is glowing white-hot --

BEN (O.S.)
-- our heat shield is loosened --

IN PHOENIX COCKPIT - THE HEAT

is roasting everyone -- Johnny, oddly, seems unaffected by the heat, but he's rattled by the fact that the ship's falling apart --

JOHNNY
-- we've lost right engine power -- interior temperature two fifty and climbing --
(losing it)
-- shit -- three hundred -- four-fifty -- the ship's breaking up --

BEN
(weak)
-- quit complaining -- try a barbeque roll --

JOHNNY
-- a barbeque what? --

Ben finds his last reserve of strength -- he turns to Johnny --

BEN
This ain't the kind of trouble you can eject out of, kid --
(seizes controls)
-- even out the fire --

Ben grabs the controls and pulls them hard to the left --

THE PHOENIX SPIRALS DOWN

in a "barbeque roll": a manuever that spreads the fire evenly along the ship by whipping it in a series of 360 degree spirals --

-- but at the same time, it greatly reduces control -- it's corkscrewing through the clouds, hurtling toward the East Coast --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE TECHNICIANS

scramble to find the ship on their screens -- one finally does --

TECHNICIAN
-- I've found them -- their trajectory is taking them over New York state --

MACLEHR
-- Good -- that's close to the Lieber aircraft testing center. There's a runway there that can take them --

But the flight controller looks intently at a different screen --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
They're not going to make it that far --
(looks up gravely)
Call out a recovery team. Now.

IN THE PHOENIX - TIGHT ON BEN'S FACE

as he fights to remain conscious and to keep the ship together. The opaque glass of the windshield is black with soot, smoke and fire: you can only vaguely see the ground racing up below --

OUTER VIEW OF PHOENIX - THE SHIP

is diving straight down toward a mountain peak in a wooded area -- there's just a couple of seconds to a one-point landing -- but --

-- it pulls up, just enough for it not to be a full dive, enough for the ship's track to match the downward slope of the mountain --

-- **the ship impacts**, hitting the mountain like a missile -- the momentum carries it as it SMASHES down the mountain slope, leaving behind a blazing trail of broken trees and shattered rocks --

-- **and is heading towards a thousand foot dropoff** --

INSIDE THE COCKPIT - THE IMPACT

throws them around like toys -- Reed holds onto Sue to try to protect her, Johnny just holds on, period, while Ben tries to steer the ship -- uselessly, because --

THE PHOENIX IS SLIDING DOWN THE SLOPE SIDEWAYS

pulverizing rocks and splintering trees in its path -- until the ground becomes uneven -- and the ship flips, snapping off one wing and its engine, rolling end over end --

-- the wing's engine and fuel **explode in a fireball** --

INSIDE THE COCKPIT - THE FIREBALL

surges into the cabin near Johnny as the ship rolls -- but mysteriously, it instantaneously **disappears** on contact -- as --

THE PHOENIX

stops flipping but continues sliding -- it's fifty feet away from the drop -- but at the last possible moment, the ship's momentum abruptly stops, resting at the edge of the dropoff.

ON THE SLOPE - REED AND SUE

are out of the ship, lying unconscious together in the snow amidst bits of burning wreckage.

At the cockpit, Johnny, half-conscious, pulls himself painfully out of the ship -- with one hand on the hull, we see that, unnoticed by Johnny, heat from his hand is actually melting an imprint in the steel. Johnny finally collapses against a rock --

-- and as the WHOPPING of a trio of helicopters draws closer, Ben tries to pull himself out of the tangled cockpit, but can't -- Ben drops inside it, looking up with his last bit of strength --

BEN'S POV - THE HELICOPTERS LAND

on the slope -- and a response team in biohazard outfits get out, heading over toward the wreck, as Ben and we --

FADE TO BLACK.

UP FROM BLACK - BEN'S POV - A SCREEN OF ARMORED GLASS

shimmers into view as Ben wakes up to see a sterile environment --

BEN SITS UP IN HIS BUNK

holding an aching head, and looks around -- he's in a quarantine cage. It's 10'x10'x10' of armored plexiglass, magnetically sealed, with cameras and monitors aimed down to record his every move. Not the nicest way to wake up. A **QUARANTINE CLOCK** reads "**36:06:08**", confirming what his stubble suggests: he's been there for a while.

BEN'S POV - THROUGH THE GLASS - ON THE OTHER SIDE

is more monitoring equipment, manned by a YOUNG TECHNICIAN in a biohazard outfit. The door opens, and Johnny, also in a biohazard outfit, enters, looking concerned. The technician confers with Johnny for a moment -- we can't hear what's being said, but Johnny's face falls after seeing what's on the clipboard the technician hands him. Ashen, pitying, Johnny looks

THROUGH THE GLASS BARRIER - BEN IS LOOKING OUT AT HIM

Ben moves to the glass barrier, and Johnny approaches the other side, nervously pasting on a fake smile. It's the look you get if you have to tell someone they're dying. Johnny hits the intercom --

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
(awkward)
How do you feel, buddy?

BEN
Like a ton of bricks.
(trying for joke)
How about you? You look like someone just repo-ed your Porsche.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
I'm -- okay. We've been here for just over a day now. The rest of us passed quarantine --

BEN
"The rest of us"?
(impatient)
What's going on, kid? If everyone else has passed Q, what am I still doing in here?

Johnny pauses, trying to figure out how to tell Ben.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
Something happened up there when we were exposed to the experiment. You were in the chamber longer than any of us.
(upset)
The doctors are still trying to work it out. But -- something up there changed you. On a cellular level. They say you're **mutating.**

Ben, shocked, looks down at his body. Nothing looks altered --yet.

BEN
Mutating? Into what?

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
There's no nice way to say it --
(blurts out)
-- you're going to become a -- a monster. And there's nothing they can do to stop it. The doctors have run a computer projection of what you're going to look like --
(looks to clipboard with barely concealed disgust)
-- it's not very pretty.

ON BEN'S FACE

as the world he knows comes to an end. But he finds some resolve.

BEN
Then show me.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
(hesitant)
Ben, it's the ugliest thing I've ever seen --

BEN
I gotta know.

Johnny nods -- swallows hard -- and starts to turn it around --

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
(sincere)
I -- I just wish I could change it somehow --

BEN'S POV ON THE GLASS - BEN MOVES CLOSER TO SEE

-- his anxious reflection is on the glass, as the clipboard is turned around to reveal --

-- **an eight by ten publicity photo** of Cmdr. Ben Grimm, awkwardly smiling but very human, posing in a flight suit by an American flag -- Ben's POV shifts up to --

-- Johnny's grinning face.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
-- nobody, but nobody, should have to go through life looking like that.

TIGHT ON BEN'S FACE

as his fear changes into total rage -- we CUT TO --

AN OUTER HALLWAY - THE YOUNG TECHNICIAN

who let Johnny in is returning -- but when he hears a building-shaking **THOOM**, he runs for the door -- there is another **THOOM** --

OUTSIDE THE QUARANTINE GLASS - BEN CHARGES THE ARMORED GLASS

Johnny is still laughing, as Ben tries to smash through again --

JOHNNY
-- now, what time did you say it was?

BEN (THROUGH INTERCOM)
I said, it's --

Johnny flips off the intercom as Ben angrily, silently runs through an NC-17 string of epithets. With a small wave goodbye, Johnny walks away. A few feet away, the technician stops him --

TECHNICIAN
What are you doing? His quarantine is up -- I thought you were going to let him out.

Johnny affects a tough military pose, and stares the techie down.

JOHNNY
Is that what you "thought" --
(reads nametag)
-- Perkins? Commander Grimm is suffering from an obvious case of post-orbital psychosis that you failed to spot.

The chagrined technician looks over -- and Ben, charging the armored glass again and again like a gorilla, indeed looks crazy.

JOHNNY
I won't put you on report -- but --
(alters clipboard)
-- you've got to maintain the Commander's quarantine for eight more hours. Minimum.

Johnny hands the relieved technician the clipboard --

TECHNICIAN
Yes, sir -- thank you, sir --

The techie awkwardly salutes Johnny, then focuses his full scrutiny on Ben. Johnny, flashing a final smirk, heads out --

-- as Ben smashes the glass, shouting silently -- we CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION BIOLAB - DAY - JOHNNY

breezes into the sterile environment. Reed and Sue go over tissue samples on four high-tech microscopes, each with monitors showing **TISSUE MOLECULAR ANALYSIS: B.GRIMM -- ELAPSED TIME 00:31:03:57,** etc. Reed looks haggard -- he's clearly been at this for hours -- and Sue is surprised that Johnny's alone as he flops into a chair.

SUE
I thought you were going to get Ben.

JOHNNY
He's still sleeping. And he looked so darn cute, I just couldn't wake him up.

Reed shoves away from one of the microscopes, perplexed, pacing --

REED
Victor's program didn't work. There's no sign of altered cellular structures at all.

SUE
You sound almost disappointed that it didn't take us apart.

REED
In a way, I am. The Phoenix, the station -- all the years of research -- Victor's death -- it was all for nothing.
(beat)
Absolutely nothing.

SUE
At least we're alive. And nobody's going to forget that Victor died a hero.

A cloud passes over Reed's face. He obviously hasn't told anyone about what Victor did. And he obviously has no intention to.

JOHNNY
Cheer up, Reed. I still don't know how we walked away from that crash.

MACLEHR (O.S.)
No one does.

MacLehr enters, with a sheaf of photos and data from the crash.

MACLEHR
The flight forensics experts want to talk to you. They've never seen anything like it.
(points to data)
The internal temperature readings show it was hot enough in there to melt steel --

JOHNNY
-- and my internal boredom readings indicate it's dull enough in here to melt my brain.

JOHNNY
(gets out of chair)
If the forensics boys want to talk to me, they can wait. I'll see you two later --
(heads for door)
-- I'm overdue for a little R&R.

As Johnny walks out, Sue turns to Reed --

SUE
So are we.

Reed looks longingly at the equipment through bloodshot eyes --

REED
But there are still some tests I haven't run -- I need another day --

SUE
I know this is your idea of a vacation -- but it isn't mine.

As Sue takes his arm and drags him off, Reed finally gives in --

REED
(over shoulder, to MacLehr)
Watch the tests. The computer analysis has another thirty-one hours to run --

MACLEHR
Sure, sure -- get some rest, Reed.

As Reed is led out, MacLehr turns his attention to the monitors, which continue the cellular breakdowns -- and we CUT TO --

EXT. **TELLURIDE** - A "HELI-SKI" COPTER SLASHES OVER THE MOUNTAINS

-- cresting a snowy ten thousand foot peak -- as --

INSIDE THE COPTER'S CABIN - JOHNNY

is dressed for the cold, and grinning across at FRANKIE RAYE -- a beautiful, athletic woman who has clearly taken a liking to Johnny in spite of his line of bull. Both have their skiis on, and the door is open, but they're not quite to the jumping point yet --

JOHNNY
-- then, Grimm told me I couldn't fly my F-18 under the bridge at Mach One. I couldn't take that kind of crack -- so I --

FRANKIE
(cuts him off)
You've been telling me all morning you're the hottest guy alive. Are you ready to prove it?
(off Johnny's grin)
A race down this peak, back to the lodge --

She bends over to give Johnny one hell of a kiss, then stands up --

FRANKIE
-- loser pays room service.

With that, Frankie drops out of the cabin door --

VIEW OF HELICOPTER OVER MOUNTAIN - FRANKIE FALLS FROM THE COPTER

as if she's done this a thousand times, and slices down the powder the instant she lands. She knows every inch of this trail.

IN THE HELICOPTER - JOHNNY

grins, equally fired up by both the race and what will follow -- he moves toward the door to jump out himself --

ON THE MOUNTAIN PEAK - JOHNNY HITS THE SNOW

anxious to start the chase. We note one thing that Johnny hasn't: Johnny has started **smouldering** -- as he skiis down the trail, there is a visible heat vapor trail in his wake.

ON FRANKIE - SWERVING EASILY DOWN A WOODED SLOPE

-- she's well ahead of Johnny --

ON JOHNNY - RACING DOWN AN EXTREME SLOPE

pushing his speed to catch up -- his adrenaline has kicked in now, so much so that he doesn't notice he's getting **hotter and hotter** -- once off the near-vertical slope, he fearlessly swerves toward unknown territory that looks like a short cut --

LONG SHOT OF JOHNNY SKIING THROUGH WOODED AREA

Pinpoint flames are bursting out of his clothes, one after the other -- there's a dozen of them and they're multiplying --

-- as he swerves through a maze of trees, he throws off jets of flame that incinerate branches before fizzling out in the snow --

TRACKING SHOT BEHIND FRANKIE - FRANKIE TURNS BACK

to see Johnny -- her grin turns into a look of fear -- because

FRANKIE'S POV - JOHNNY'S BACK AND LEGS ARE COMPLETELY ON FIRE

-- he's shooting down the trail like a rocket sled, past an astonished Frankie who stops in her tracks, as Johnny, still oblivious, still laughing, flashes past her -- until finally --

JOHNNY

executes a perfect halt, a hundred feet down from Frankie -- he turns to look up at her proudly, unaware of what the problem is --

JOHNNY
Come on, Frankie -- if you want to hang around with Johnny Storm, you'd better get used to coming in second --

But Johnny takes in the horrified look on Frankie's face -- he finally looks down and realizes that **he is on fire** -- there are now at least thirty pinpoint flames burning through his clothes. Johnny's momentary look of amused victory turns to one of terror --

-- and before Johnny can react, his body **bursts into a full fireball**, extending a viscous, gaseous flame several feet out --

CLOSE ON FRANKIE'S FACE

Her horror grows as this becomes even more inexplicable --

IN THE CENTER OF THE FIREBALL - JOHNNY IS TERRIFIED

-- but in no physical pain whatsoever. Looking like a demon in the blaze, which steadily, evenly flows around him, he stares at his hands -- and in reaction to his thought, the flame ripples --

-- and **all of the flame surrounding Johnny's body goes out**. The fireball has affected everything around Johnny: ice near him has melted into a moat of slush, branches hanging low over him have been incinerated, and his clothes are now just hanging, charred shreds, but Johnny's body is completely unmarked.

Off Johnny's look of awe -- we CUT TO --

EXT. CONNECTICUT - A COZY WOODED CABIN - PRE-DAWN

In the moments just before sunrise, we PAN AROUND the bedroom, past a sliding glass door that opens to a back deck overlooking the wilderness -- we can't see anyone, but we hear, from outside --

SUE (O.S.)
Reed? You're missing a beautiful sunrise.

As the camera PANS AROUND, we find Reed still in bed, asleep. But what's unusual here is that Reed has slept in a very odd angle -- all of his limbs are splayed and stretched out in impossible angles. As he starts to come around, his body changes back to normalcy, like a rubber doll returning to its original dimensions.

Reed groggily gets up, pulling on a bathrobe, and moves to the door, stretching in an ordinary, waking-up way -- but as he does --

-- **his arms stretch out ten feet each**, brushing the limits of the room, then snap back to their proper proportions.

Reed pauses, surprised -- but shrugs it off. That was impossible, and he's still half asleep.

SUE (O.S.)
Oh, Reed, you have to see this. Get out here.

REED
Coming, honey.

Reed, still a bit thrown, moves outside to --

THE DECK

-- and as promised, the sunrise is worth waking for. Dawn breaks through the hills, and a morning mist rises toward the cabin.

Reed emerges, looking out at it, smiling -- it's a nice sunrise. But something's wrong with this picture:

SUE (O.S.)
Isn't it spectacular?

At Sue's voice, Reed starts -- it was very close, and Sue is nowhere to be seen. Is he dreaming? He looks left, then right --

SUE (O.S.)
(lightly sarcastic)
I know you'd rather be in the lab -- but isn't this sort of nice too?

Reed is startled further when he feels something -- Sue's hand -- brushing against his chest -- he jumps back, away --

SUE (O.S.)
(hurt, mad)
Well, what's your problem?

Reed looks to the source of the voice -- and sees --

SUE'S OUTLINE IN THE MIST

As the morning fog swirls up the deck, it envelops Sue, creating an imperfect outline -- but she is otherwise utterly transparent.

We can vaguely make out enough of her ghostly image to see that she finally realizes what's happened to her -- she looks down and sees that she has vanished. Terrified, she turns to Reed --

SUE
Reed -- ?

Reed quickly moves toward Sue's outline -- but Sue, panicked, freezes, and as Reed comes towards her --

-- a **wave of energy**, invisible except for a prismatic breaking of light at its fringes, **bursts from Sue's body reflexively** --

-- and the force field knocks Reed back across the deck as if he were hit by a wrecking ball -- he flies ten feet toward the other side, and crashes against a wooden railing. When he impacts against the deck, all of his limbs plasticize, stretch and loosen into a tangle -- he looks as if he's made of half-melted rubber.

Reed looks down at his tangled body with both astonishment and clinical interest. He looks up at --

SUE'S TRANSPARENT FACE

which is visible only from the fog clinging to it. As dawn breaks through her body, she asks the question on everyone's mind --

SUE
(frightened)
What's happening to us?

CUT TO:

INT. **A SUBURBAN NEW YORK HOUSE** - YANCY STREET - MORNING

We head into the house, which is unmistakably Ben Grimm's -- it's stocked with simple Archie Bunker furniture, and scattered with trophies from his college football and baseball days --

-- we find Ben, just dressed in some shorts and a tank top, standing a little anxiously at a hallway chest, looking down at a a cigar box. Working up his nerve, Ben opens the box --

INSIDE THE BOX - BEN

clears away some of the cigars, and we see what the anxiety is about -- there's an engagement ring stashed underneath the cigars.

BEN

stares at it, steeling himself -- his face tells us this isn't the first time he's tried to pick it up. Ben is startled out of it --

CARLENE (O.S.)
(laughing)
You're having a cigar? At nine in the morning?

Carlene walks out, wearing a bathrobe, looking beautiful. Ben nervously covers, pulling out a cigar and shutting the box --

BEN
You caught me. Breakfast o' champions.

CARLENE
Suit yourself. Guess I'd better do this while you still taste like you --

Carlene walks up to Ben and does exactly that -- she plants a long, loving kiss on him, and walks off, smiling back at Ben.

Ben smiles too -- and without hesitation, pulls out the ring. As --

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - YANCY STREET

is in a typical, middle-class suburb. But today, it's being invaded -- a convoy of government sedans converge on Ben's house.

INSIDE THE KICHEN - BEN WALKS IN

as Carlene, who's making coffee, looks up. Ben looks lovestruck and dumbstruck, working up his nerve and clutching the box.

CARLENE
Does this mean you want a real breakfast?

BEN
(smiling)
Yeah. Matter of fact, I think I could get used to this.
(building up to it)
Carly -- listen -- I --

Carlene looks up, because Ben is acting so oddly -- but before Ben can spit it out, the DOORBELL chimes. Ben exhales nervously --

BEN
Stay put. I'll get rid of 'em.

Ben walks off to do that, but as he does, we see that under his shirt, **irregular, rust-colored blotches** are forming on his back.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - A GROUP OF FULLY ARMED **TACTICAL OPS**

in body armor are quietly taking positions around the house.

INSIDE THE HOUSE - BEN OPENS THE FRONT DOOR

to see MacLehr, with two tactical ops. Ben eyes the body armor --

BEN
Nice costume. Halloween was last month --
(starts to close door)
-- and I'm off duty.

MacLehr holds the door open -- gently, but firmly.

MACLEHR
I'm sorry, Commander -- but you've got to come back with us. There was a biological anomoly from your exposure to the experiment -- the quarantine's back on.

BEN
That's almost as funny as your outfit. Listen, Storm's already pulled that one on me -- so why don't you run along and tell him I never fall for the same gag twice.

Ben closes the door solidly in MacLehr's face -- but the SLAM is a little too solid --

-- Ben steps back -- the doorjamb is splintered, and the doorknob has been crushed as if it were made out of wax. He looks down, and sees that hair has fallen from his head to the floor. As Ben backs away, he sees, in a hallway mirror --

BEN'S POV IN MIRROR

Ben sees that he **is** transforming -- his hair is rapidly falling away from his head, the rust-colored blotching on his skin is spreading rapidly and toughening into something like rhino hide.

The transformation accelerates: Ben watches his deformities bloom as his skin changes color and toughens into something like armor, building around his body. Ben's growing look of revulsion and fear alters further as the shape of his face and head changes --

-- and Ben is not just in emotional anguish: the transformation seems to be physically painful, as if his bones were tearing themselves out of his body to create an exo-skeleton. Ben shoots out an arm, SHATTERING the mirror and the wall behind it -- as --

IN THE HALLWAY - CARLENE IS WALKING OUT

worried by the noise. She reaches the end of the hallway to see --

THE THING

at the other end of the living room. He is, simply, a hideous monster. Ben's eyes show how terrified he is -- he reaches out --

BEN
(voice muffled from change)
-- Carly -- help me --

Frightened, vulnerable, in physical pain, Ben lurches toward her -- and Carlene, horrified, revolted, and afraid -- what if it's catching? -- backs away, stumbling toward a door --

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - CARLENE RUNS OUT A SIDE DOOR

-- but right behind her -- **Ben bursts out through the wall** in a shower of splinters and concrete shards -- he is confused, frightened, and in a state of raging adrenalin from the change. Ben starts after Carlene -- as

A STUNNED TACTICAL OP GAPES AT BEN

-- they were told to expect anything, but no one could prepare for this. This looks like a monster attacking a defenseless woman --

TACTICAL OP
-- He's going after the girl! Trank him!

Several ops turn, readying tranquilizer darts -- and one fires --

A DART PIERCES BEN'S HIDE

-- but it doesn't take him down -- in fact, if anything, it just makes him angry -- and his fear changes into adrenalin-fueled rage, rage that now has a focus --

-- Ben charges the soldiers, knocking them aside like toys as other soldiers, out of their depth, scatter. Ben heads toward

A PANICKED CARLENE

joins MacLehr down the street, behind ops with tranquilizer darts. MacLehr is as rattled as an op who hesitantly aims his rifle --

MACLEHR
Fire!

The op pulls it together and fires at --

A RAMPAGING BEN GRIMM

-- the dart pierces Ben's hide, to **absolutely no effect** -- another dart hits Ben -- then another -- with four darts in him, Ben is slowed, but not much -- with a wild, groggy swing, he backhands a lightpole, crumpling it like a car antenna --

-- and as Ben staggers within three feet of Carlene, MacLehr and the op, a fifth dart is fired point-blank into Ben's chest --

-- and Ben finally falls over, unconscious, at MacLehr's feet. The changes to Ben's body are still occurring as we --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LIEBER AIRCRAFT TESTING CENTER - UPSTATE NEW YORK - DAY

We see the remote complex of buildings dedicated to testing and building new military aircraft, behind a heavily guarded, high security fence, as we hear the clinical voice of --

REED (V.O.)
We are now in our fifteenth day of total seclusion at the Lieber Aircraft Test Center. The apparatus for stress tests on aircraft is ideal for our examination, as is the advanced security of the facility. So far, Susan and I have concluded that the molecular restructuring of our bodies took seventy-two hours to fully take effect, and thus eluded our first examination on the cellular level.

INT. TESTING CENTER - DAY - REED

is in the midst of an enormous room crowded with machines designed for various stress tests on airplane parts.

REED (V.O.)
Each of us has sustained severe mutagenic changes to our molecular structure. Our flight suits were molecularly altered as well, allowing us to wear them in our tests. I have found that I am able to stretch my body into any shape or dimension I wish --

-- in one machine, Reed is "wound" by the lower half of his body into a rotating group of metal spools that stretch his body up like a taffy puller.

His torso is so completely undisturbed that Reed carefully observes this "winding" while taking notes on it.

REED (V.O.)
-- so far, the only limits to this malleability correlate with my own mental control -- and I am growing more skillful with practice. There appear to be no ill effects to my circulatory system --

IN AN OPTICS BOOTH - SUE IS VISIBLE

as ordinary lighting, and several types of lasers, trace her body. As she focuses intensely, she starts to vanish -- and as she extends a partially visible hand toward a panel, it too becomes invisible -- as Reed's voice FADES OUT, Sue's voice seamlessly FADES UP in mid-entry --

SUE (V.O.)
-- the changes that have occurred within my body are unprecedented. By concentrating, I can project a field that bends light around myself, rendering my body, my clothing and even selected objects totally invisible, reflecting no spectrum of light that we've focused upon it. Even stranger --

IN ANOTHER TEST HANGAR - A FUSELAGE

that must weigh over a thousand pounds is hanging thirty feet from a ceiling crane, and Sue is standing back from it, concentrating --

SUE (V.O.)
-- is a mental ability to project a force field of energy that can surround, or lift, objects. The effort is exhausting --

Sue focuses a force field under the fuselage that slowly lifts it off its support chains. Sue fights to hold it as long as she can --

SUE (V.O.)
-- and I have yet to determine my limits.

As we hear this, Sue's concentration finally folds -- and the field underneath the fuselage drops -- the shock of this causes the fuselage to fall thirty feet to the cleared area below.

LATER - IN A WIND TUNNEL - **JOHNNY IS ENGULFED IN FLAME**

and flying "in place" in the center of the tunnel's full force --

SUE (V.O.)
The alterations to Johnny's body had an early manifestation: he is now physically able to absorb incredibly high concentrations of heat. As our ship entered the atmosphere, Johnny's body took in the heat that the shield failed to deflect -- if it hadn't, we'd have been roasted alive.

LATER - IN A TEST CHAMBER - JOHNNY ZIG-ZAGS AT HIGH SPEED

through a half-dozen empty fuselages hanging from ceiling chains, testing his full range of flying motion --

SUE (V.O.)
Johnny is now able to spontaneously burst into a sheath of flame that coats, but does not consume, his body -- and by directing this flame backwards, he is even able to fly at will. Limits have yet to be determined --

IN ANOTHER TEST CHAMBER - AN AIRPLANE JET ENGINE

suspended from ceiling chains fires out its flaming exhaust. Johnny, not fully on fire, has one arm extended in the flame, while his other arm is extended into a small metal box with a temperature guage, generating its own flame exhaust, as both Reed and Sue observe. Sue concludes her observations into a recorder --

SUE
-- I am proceeding with caution.

Reed eyes the equipment -- Johnny is comfortable, but the jet flame registers as a constant **2,800F**, while the fire blasting from Johnny's other arm is **2,910F** and climbing: **-- 3,068F -- 3,293F --**

REED
This is incredible -- your body is actually amplifying the heat it's taking in.

Reed turns off the jet, as Johnny withdraws his hand, smiling.

JOHNNY
Come on -- it was just starting to tickle.

REED
We'll have to move slowly on figuring out your limits. Your fire is plasma flame -- the same kind found on the surface of stars.
(beat)
There's a danger that you could go nova.

JOHNNY
Cool.

SUE
This is no joke, Johnny. At a certain point, your body's temperature acceleration could go out of control, amplifying and re-amplifying until it consumes itself -- and you with it.

JOHNNY
All right, I'll be careful -- just tell me when I can leave. I'm not spending New Year's Eve in this morgue.

REED
Well -- the molecular restructuring inside our bodies is complete, and it's bonded to our individual cellular structure. There's no danger of contagion -- so --
(Sue nods in confirmation)
-- as long as we maintain control, I'd say we can rejoin ordinary society immediately.

Johnny is about to let loose with a cry of joy, when behind them, we hear a raspy voice that comes from a granite-lined larynx --

BEN (O.S.)
What about me, Richards?

THE THING

enters: his body has now fully taken on its final form, an orange mosaic of rough, irregularly shaped stone. Under the ledge that's now his brow, the eyes are unmistakably those of Ben Grimm -- and etched on his face is a sardonic sense of humor masking his pain.

BEN
When do I get to rejoin ordinary society?

As Ben loudly crosses the stone floor, everyone's mood drops -- especially Reed's. His feelings of guilt are obvious from his face.

BEN
Hey -- I didn't mean to spoil the party.

REED
I'm sorry, Ben. You've taken a worse hit than any of us. But this transformation happened to you through a device I created --

Ben cuts him off with a bitter laugh --

BEN
Trust me, pal. I ain't about to forget that.

REED
-- and I won't rest until I find a way to reverse it.

Ben, unmoved, reaches Reed, clutching a newspaper in his huge hand.

BEN
Sure. Sure you will. It don't really matter much anyways -- 'cause I don't think any of us are leaving this zoo for a while.

Ben hands the paper to Reed, as Johnny and Sue crowd in for a look. All three of them are speechless as we see --

THE "USA TODAY" FRONT PAGE - **COLOR PHOTOS OF THE FOUR**

are above a banner headline reading: **NATION MOURNS HEROIC FOUR -- ASTRONAUTS DIE FROM EXPOSURE TO MYSTERIOUS "COSMIC RAYS".**

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN - TIMES SQUARE - DAY - THE JUMBOTRON

in the midst of the ever-crowded area is flashing the message "HAPPY NEW YEAR" -- our VIEW SHIFTS down a side street, finding --

A SKYSCRAPER CONSTRUCTION SITE - LONG SHOT

where, despite the "CLOSED FOR HOLIDAY" sign on a plywood barrier, something is afoot -- as we MOVE CLOSER -- we see a security guard slumped in a booth, riddled with bullets, dead. Beyond him --

-- four men, who look like construction workers -- except for the machine guns they carry -- get into four personnel cage elevators in the corners of the steel framework. We track their progress in

THE ELEVATORS GOING UP THE FRAMEWORK

-- each of the cars, moving in synch, passes a large, bulbous metal cannister winching up the center of the framework from a crane. The elevators and the cannister top the climb --

-- and reach a top level. A helicopter sits on the level's fringe -- and in the center of the level, overseeing all of this --

MARIUS MORLAK

also known as the leader of the Enclave -- with a nod to the men --

WIDER SHOT - THE FOUR ELEVATOR CABLES

are **blown** simultaneously -- each elevator plummets forty stories to CRASH at the base, effectively cutting off access to the site --

IN THE CENTER - THE METAL CANNISTER COMPLETES ITS ASCENT

-- and we see a timer mechanism on the front -- it stops even with Morlak, who smiles: everything is going according to plan.

CUT TO:

INT. MACLEHR'S OFFICE - DAY - MACLEHR

is in an office lined with computer equipment, behind a desk, and on the phone. Reed bursts in, with a pair of tactical ops behind him -- he stretches his arm across the room and hangs up the phone.

REED
He'll call back.
(shoves paper in his face)
While you're waiting, you can tell me exactly what this means.

MacLehr, nonplussed, eyes the "USA TODAY" front page, held at ten-foot arm's length by Reed, and shrugs --

MACLEHR
"Cosmic rays"? I know it sounds a bit corny, but I was on a tight deadline.
(beat)
You would have liked the ceremony. Grimm's squadron flew a "missing man" formation over Arlington at the end.

REED
You have no right or reason to hold us here. Nothing about our condition is contagious --

MACLEHR
Maybe. Maybe not. But you've been classified as X-level anomalies. And since you used to sit in this chair, you know what that means.
(beat)
You have to be contained until we can comprehend or replicate what's happened. If you can't be contained --

MacLehr shrugs -- the threat is obvious. Reed's face shows his astonishment, as an AIDE of MacLehr's rushes in with a videotape --

MACLEHR
We're going to have many, many opportunities to discuss this later. Now is not the time. The call you interrupted was from the FBI -- they want a threat assessment from OTI.
(to aide)
Is that the tape?

The aide nods, and starts it in a VCR mounted on the wall.

In the videotape view on the television, Morlak is atop the skyscraper, appearing calm, but determined --

MORLAK (ON TAPE)
This message is for the Governor of New York. I am Marius Morlak, leader of the Enclave.

Reed and MacLehr watch the tape --

MACLEHR
Another peace dividend. This nut's a former Department of Defense scientist, but two years ago his job was eliminated.

On the tape, Morlak gestures to the bomb hanging from the girders behind him --

MORLAK (ON TAPE)
Behind me you see a fuel air explosive, packed with three thousand gallons of flammable gas that I will release and ignite in a two-stage explosion two hours from now.
(beat)
The effect? A surging wall of fire that will incinerate a six-block radius -- and an explosive concussion that will, at its center, exceed that of a nuclear bomb. The death toll? As high-rises topple like burning dominos through New York, hundreds of thousands will die. Your options to stop me?
(beat)
Just one. Deliver one hundred million dollars in uncut diamonds, taken from the diamond warehouses of the jewelry district, before my deadline is reached.

Morlak points to a timer, racing down in hundredth-second units -- 118:43:00 -- 118:42:00 -- and he holds a remote control --

MORLAK (ON TAPE)
If you do as I say, I will deactivate the bomb with this. If you deviate from my demands, I will not hesitate to deliver immediate Armageddon.
(beat)
You may begin counting diamonds, or corpses. Which you choose is of no consequence to me.

REED AND MACLEHR

Reed seems to take this very seriously, while MacLehr is dismissive. Behind them, the aide is holding the phone out --

AIDE
It's the FBI, sir --

MacLehr takes it, enjoying the fact that he's now in charge.

MACLEHR (INTO PHONE)
Levenger? MacLehr of OTI. I've seen the tape. My scientific assessment?
(beat)
I'd say his cheese has slipped off his cracker. This thing is a hoax.
(Reed reacts incredulously)
FAEs are too tough to make for a guy that far gone.

MACLEHR
It looks to me like he just hung the back of a cement mixer from the girders. The chances of it being genuine are slim and none. I'd say you should proceed accordingly.

MacLehr hangs up -- and Reed starts protesting --

REED
Building an FAE is child's play for someone with Morlak's background -- and disguising one as a cement mixer is the perfect way to smuggle it into Manhattan --

MACLEHR
Look -- I've made my call --

REED
The wrong call. If they don't handle him right, midtown's going to be an inferno --

MACLEHR
In case you hadn't noticed, Richards, you're not in charge here anymore.
(motions to tactical ops)
I know you're used to being the top designer at the agency -- but now you're just the top lab rat. Better start adjusting.
(to tactical ops)
Escort Dr. Richards back to his quarters.

The armed ops grab Reed gently but firmly, as we CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING QUARTERS - DAY - BEN, REED, JOHHNY AND SUE

are in an area that's half rec room, half detention cell, built into the center of their quarters. The adjustments made for their comfort only accent the fact that this is, unmistakably, a cage.

Ben is seated in a specially constructed steel hydraulic "easy chair", channel surfing with a steel remote the size of a hardback book, modified for his gigantic fingers. Ben stops when he hits a run of "WHITE HEAT" -- he leans back to enjoy, as behind him --

JOHNNY PACES BACK AND FORTH RESTLESSLY

as a ceiling camera follows him. Johnny can't take it any more -- he whips a fireball at the camera, turning it into molten slag.

JOHNNY
This sucks.
(looks at "WHITE HEAT")
Look at those guys. They're in prison, but at least they don't have to wear circus outfits.

On screen, Cagney leads the prison break out --

BEN
Now why couldn't we be in that kind of jail? Huff and puff and the wall caves in.

SUE
Keep dreaming, Ben. We're two hundred feet underground -- there's a two foot thick titanium door at the end of the level -- and there are guards everywhere. It's hopeless.

Sue crosses over to Reed, who is lost in thought. When the movie breaks, Reed's head turns at the sound of the television --

-- a reporter is covering the New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square, which is already packed with thousands of happy people.

REED AND SUE

stare blankly at the screen, both thinking the same thing --

SUE
They don't even know the bomb is there. Can't the police do anything?

REED
They're powerless to stop it.

Reed makes a decision. He turns off the TV, and faces the others --

REED
But we're not. We're twenty minutes from the city by air. With these abilities -- these powers -- we're the only ones who can stop that catastrophe before it happens.

Johnny and Sue consider this. Ben, unmoved, clicks the TV back on.

BEN
I don't see how public service has got me anywhere lately. And New York's an eyesore anyways.

REED
Sure. What's the point? If you can't be a part of the normal world, it might as well get blown up, right?

Ben crumples the steel remote like a beer can, and angrily gets up to stand toe to toe with Reed. Ben pokes his finger at Reed's chest, which indents around it like the Pilsbury Dough Boy's --

BEN
In case you forgot -- last time we followed your lead, we got our molecules scrambled.
(another poke)
I don't think I wanna see how you can screw this one up.

REED
Then give up, Grimm.
(hot)
I've spent my whole life locked up in labs trying to see things no one's ever seen, and do things no one's ever done. I didn't do all that so I could spend the rest of my life at the wrong end of the microscope in this lab.

Reed, forcefully pokes his finger in Ben's chest -- he's too mad to notice it's flattening like rubber against Ben's hide.

REED
You've got two choices, Grimm. Find enough guts to follow me out into the real world -- or let MacLehr chisel pieces off you until there's nothing left.
(beat)
What'll it be?

Ben's anger, which has been mounting through Reed's whole harrangue, peaks -- we hear the stone grinding of his right fist clenching -- Ben draws back to strike -- and we CUT TO --

INT. SUBLEVEL SIX CORRIDOR - A STEEL DOOR **FLIES** OUT

ten feet across the corridor to smash the opposite wall -- and

BEN

steps out of the doorway, blowing the grey paint from the door off his knuckles, and the others follow. Ben turns to Reed --

BEN
Okay, genius -- the first one's on me.
(points to titanium door)
But who's gonna open the big one for us?

REED
(smiles)
MacLehr.

INT. SECURITY CONSOLE - A SURVEILLANCE WORKER

named HAMILTON snaps out of a stupor when he sees something unexpected on the "SUBLEVEL SIX" camera monitor --

-- on the screen, MacLehr is glaring impatiently up at the lens --

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
-- Hamilton? -- Wake up. We've got a problem.

HAMILTON
Yes, sir -- what is it?

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
There's a bug in the security matrix for sublevel six. Shut it down.

Hamilton looks at his board -- no problems are evident.

HAMILTON
Uh -- I don't see any problem, sir --

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
That is the problem, you idiot -- the malfunctions aren't showing up on the monitors. Shut it down. I'll fix it up there.

Hamilton, chastened, keys it -- we see "**SECURITY SHUTDOWN - SUBLEVEL SIX**" on a monitor. MacLehr remains on camera, glaring.

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
Now open the titanium door manually --

ON SUBLEVEL SIX - IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA - "MACLEHR"

is really Reed -- he has, by sheer will, **altered his facial features** to mimic MacLehr's. Ben, Johnny and Sue stand to the side, away from the camera view, in front of the huge door.

REED/MACLEHR
-- I'd like to be able to get off this level.

IN THE SECURITY CONSOLE - HAMILTON

manually punches in controls -- as his attention is diverted from the security monitor for a moment, we see that Reed's "MacLehr" face is slipping, shifting back into a hybrid of his and Reed's --

ON SUBLEVEL SIX - THE TWO FOOT THICK DOOR

slowly grinds up -- Reed is trying to hold his face together, but the harder he tries, the more his face **warps** --

IN THE SECURITY CONSOLE - HAMILTON SEES REED'S WARPED FACE

contorting into impossible, ghastly shapes -- he hits the controls to close the door, and triggers a general alarm --

ON SUBLEVEL SIX - THE DOOR STARTS TO GRIND DOWN

Reed steps away from the camera, trying to regain control of his appearance -- and as an alarm KLAXON starts, Ben steps forward, pulling out the surveillance camera in a shower of sparks --

JOHNNY
I told you if you made that face it might freeze that way.

BEN
And I told you, you can't yak your way through a two foot metal door --

Ben reaches under the door -- it's almost shut, but Ben stops it, straining, and slowly forces the door back up, inch by inch --

-- as he does, Reed elongates his body -- and snakes into the hole where the security camera once was --

VIEW FROM OTHER SIDE OF DOOR

as it shudders and heaves upward, totally demolished by Ben. Johnny, Ben and Sue, now free, run ahead through the corridor --

MACLEHR'S OFFICE - MACLEHR

leaps from his desk as another TACTICAL OP bursts in --

TACTICAL OP
They're heading to level three!

MACLEHR
That's where the experimental aircraft are -- Richards designed half of them -- and Grimm's checked out on them too --
(to op)
Send all your men to that level!

THE TOP LEVEL'S HUGE AIRCRAFT HANGAR

has rows of experimental planes -- the four haven't arrived yet, but twenty tactical ops run in, creating a two-row, picture-perfect firing formation in front of the elevator. They wait --

-- the elevator door chimes -- the door opens -- and nothing happens. There's no noise -- not even a car -- just an empty shaft.

The tactical ops stare straight ahead, thrown. A younger op, clearly a rookie, is motioned ahead to check it out.

Gun held high, the op nervously steps to the shaft and looks down -- as he does a CRACKLING sound grows LOUDER --

THE OP'S POV - **THE HUMAN TORCH**

blazes up the shaft like a rocket, directly into the op's face --

THE YOUNGER OP

flings himself back from the shaft, his eybrows singed from the heat -- as he jumps back, **the Torch blasts past him and over the heads** of the other ops, most of whom take the only reasonable course of action: they scatter in all directions -- as they do --

JOHNNY

is actually having fun, flying rings around the fleeing ops -- some fire, but none can get a bead on him as he zips up, flying through test fuselages hanging from the ceiling -- until --

-- one of the ops uncoils a fire hose -- as another op turns the spigot, he aims it up at Johnny, swooping down for a low pass. The blast of water connects, extinguishing Johnny's flame -- he crashes to the concrete, sopping wet and steaming, in a heap.

ONE OF THE OPS **TAKES AIM AT JOHNNY**

as he's an easy target -- but as he squeezes the trigger to fire --

-- Sue's **force field barrier forms a sphere around the op** -- the automatic fire from his gun ricochets inside the sphere at the op -- he's saved by his body armor, but he's not enjoying it --

-- as the field is created, Sue becomes visible -- and she angrily BLASTS the force field sphere against a wall with the op inside it, colliding with the op with the hose to knock them both out.

Sue turns to Johnny -- a sheepish, steaming mess -- and gives him the withering look that you can only get from your sister --

SUE
Dry off and get up. You've got to keep looking out for me.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE HANGAR - THE LAST REMAINING OP

is running away -- it's the same one who fired the trank shots at Ben. As he reaches the door, he ends up nose-to-granite-nose with

THE THING

who, for the first time in this form, grinds his stone features into a smile -- as the op freezes in terror, Ben raises one hand, cocks back one finger against his thumb for a "flick" -- and --

IN THE HANGAR - **A WINDOW SHATTERS**

as the op flies through it, upside down and backwards, skidding to an unconscious halt a few feet after landing.

Ben rumbles toward the plane -- Sue and Johnny are already aboard. Reed's head snakes out of a side vent --

REED
Ben -- quit clowning and get in the plane --

THE EXPERIMENTAL PLANE

is a unique design of Reed's: it's segmented into four individual sections, with two of the cockpits located on the inner edges of the wings. Johnny and Sue are already strapped into theirs. Ben climbs, with difficulty, into the rear section, which GROANS under his weight: it's not exactly designed for his bulk.

REED (O.S.)
Can you handle the pre-flight?

BEN
Can you give a ten minute speech without saying a damn thing? Of course I can --

Ben starts working the controls -- but everything he touches on the control panel seems to bend or break in his too-strong, too-heavy hands. Somehow, Ben manages anyway, and the plane starts a shaky, Harrier-style vertical liftoff, rocking back and forth --

IN THE HANGAR - THE ROOF DOORS OPEN

revealing nothing but blue skies -- and Reed, now in the cockpit, takes the controls, oblivious to Ben's difficulties.

REED
I'll take over if you don't mind, Ben --

BEN
(uncommonly easygoing)
Uh -- sure --

THE PLANE VERTICALLY RISES OUT OF THE ROOF DOORS

and switches to horizontal thrust -- it BLASTS away -- just as --

-- MacLehr and a group of tactical ops arrive, with bigger weapons than before. MacLehr looks up and keys a radio --

MACLEHR
Mobilize the pursuit choppers. I don't know how or if their minds have been affected, but we can't take any chances --
(beat)
Authorize them to use deadly force.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY - **THE NEW YEAR'S CROWD**

is already amassing -- the "ball" hangs from a building, and there's a general party atmosphere in the air as a local TV REPORTER has set himself up in a booth, with his report shown on the enormous screen of the nearby Jumbotron --

REPORTER (TO CAMERA)
-- it's only five o'clock, and we estimate there are nearly ten thousand people in Times Square who can't wait for the New Year --

Our view moves away from the festivities -- and back to --

THE SKYSCRAPER CONSTRUCTION PLATFORM - MORLAK

stands in the center of the framework of girders, at ease, clutching the remote activator for the bomb, which creaks in the breeze. An equipment winch is hauling up a large metal box -- and

DOWN BELOW - A GROUP OF FBI AGENTS

who've sent the ransom look up expectantly -- as --

ON THE TOP STORY - MORLAK OPENS THE BOX

-- it is full to the brim with diamonds. Or are they? With a jeweller's loupe in his eye, Morlak squints at a "gem" -- and he kicks over the box, scattering it forty stories below.

MORLAK
Fakes. But the threat remains quite genuine.
(to one of his men)
After this, I think we can raise the price to two hundred million when we visit Chicago.

Morlak's men prep the helicopter for an exit, and Morlak eyes the timer, which is now down to **10:00:00:00 -- 09:59:00:00** -- as --

THE FANTASTIC FOUR ENTER MANHATTAN AIRSPACE

in the experimental aircraft, passing the Statue of Liberty -- and a pursuit jet helicopter BLASTS into view, tracking behind them --

REED
They're right behind us -- get ready --

All put on headset radios -- all except Ben, that is: his head is too big and he has no earhole to plug into. Frustrated, he crumples the headset into a ball, as the cockpit radios start:

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
Dr. Richards, this is your final warning -- fly back to base under my escort, or I will be forced to fire upon you. Please respond --

Reed turns to look at the others -- this is the moment of truth.

REED
This is it -- there's no turning back if we do this. Are you ready?

All answer with a look -- they're behind him.

REED
All right -- remove fail-safe --

Each of them reaches up to unlatch a ceiling switch -- as --

INSIDE THE PURSUIT HELICOPTER - MACLEHR

is in the gunner's seat -- he turns to the pilot --

MACLEHR
They're not responding -- we can't wait for a dogfight over the city --

He flips the safety off the "**HEAT SEEKING MISSILE**" button -- as --

INSIDE THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT - THE FOUR WORK THE SWITCHES

on the ceiling console in perfect synch, under Reed's guidance --

REED
Unlatch release switches --

IN THE PURSUIT HELICOPTER - THE FIRING CONTROL PANEL

-- a few seconds of machinery warming up, the missile is **armed** -- MacLehr fires -- the missile **BLASTS** out of its mount --

INSIDE THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT

In the same split second that the helicopter fires its missile --

REED
Release now --

All four simultaneously pull the release switches above them -- and as the missile tracks closer -- **each segment extends** -- **explosive bolts fire** -- and

THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT BLASTS INTO FOUR SEPARATE CRAFTS

that track off in four separate directions --

IN THE PURSUIT HELICOPTER - MACLEHR AND THE PILOT

are agape -- this is a first --

THE HEAT-SEEKING MISSILE

tracks right after Johnny's craft, accelerating to catch up --

INSIDE REED'S CRAFT

Reed turns to see where the missile is going --

REED (INTO RADIO)
Johnny -- the missile's right on your tail --

INSIDE JOHNNY'S CRAFT - JOHNNY

enjoys the adrenalin buzz of a lifetime as the missile nears --

JOHNNY (INTO RADIO)
Relax, Reed -- that's the first stage -- now for the second --
(throws open canopy)
-- **flame on!**

Johnny's **body erupts into a geyser of flame** that arcs him out of the cockpit just ahead of --

THE MISSILE'S IMPACT

against the afterburner -- the plane **explodes** in a fireball --

-- and Johnny **streaks out of it**, ahead of the concussion, LAUGHING almost loud enough to be heard over the sound of the blast --

-- turning, he flames toward Manhattan -- and we see that the other planes are already over Manhattan's East Side --

HIGH ANGLE - REED'S PLANE AND SUE'S PLANE

are flying side by side, turning down Broadway to track south toward Times Square, as astonished passersby look up --

REED (OVER RADIO)
Now that we're away, land on that roof.

SUE (OVER RADIO)
But the bomb is in the construction site --

REED (OVER RADIO)
(cuts her off)
That's right. And you're not going to be anywhere near it.

SUE (OVER RADIO)
Reed --

REED (OVER RADIO)
No buts -- I've gotten you into enough trouble for a lifetime already. Now land.

Reluctantly, Sue veers away from Reed -- her plane lands on a roof over Times Square, as Reed tracks toward the Enclave's skyscraper.

DOWN ON THE GROUND - THE TELEVISION REPORTER

gapes up at these mini-Harriers zipping all over midtown --

REPORTER
What the hell --
(to cameraman)
Get this on tape!

The cameraman scrambles as, above, one craft is flying crookedly --

IN BEN'S CRAFT - BEN

is having trouble: he's handling his controls as gently as if they were made of spun glass, but he's still breaking everything. The stick jams, bent in one direction: a kamikaze dive directly toward the top crane platform of the skyscraper under construction --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

which shows no fear, just a mix of irritation and embarrassment --

BEN'S PLANE CRASHES INTO THE PLATFORM

and plows through the giant crane mounted there -- as the plane and the crane become the same tangle of wreckage, Ben crawls out without a scratch -- nothing hurt but his pride. As, below him --

HIGH ANGLE - REED'S PLANE LANDS HORIZONTALLY ON A LOWER LEVEL

-- he's many stories below the Enclave, but only a few above the FBI agents, who look up astonished as --

-- Reed gets out of the vehicle and stretches up the center of the building, snaking in and out of girders in his path -- toward --

THE UPPER LEVEL - THE ENCLAVE

is preparing to leave via helicopter -- and the timer on the bomb races down -- **04:28:00** -- **04:27:00** --

Reed's head stretches up through the center to eyeball the bomb's detonation device -- but as he does --

AN ENCLAVE MEMBER TURNS TOWARD REED

with a machine gun and fires a short point blank burst --

-- Reed turns at the sound, twisting his body, and though his chest is thin and widened, he visibly tenses with fear -- this is probably the first time in his life he's ever been shot at --

-- **twenty bullets hit Reed in the chest** -- but they don't penetrate -- Reed's torso catches them like hard rubber, and flings them back at the Enclave member --

-- the Enclave member is struck by the bullets, not with penetrating force, but enough power to knock him off the girder -- the Enclave member falls to his death, screaming --

-- and from the look on Reed's face, it's a draw as to who was more surprised. As Reed tries to figure out what to do next --

MORLAK

about to board the helicopter with several other Enclave agents, looks down, thunderstruck -- whatever contingencies he'd prepared for, this wasn't one of them. Something else catches his attention -- the WHOPPING of another helicopter, above -- where

ON THE CRANE PLATFORM - BEN

is being shot at by the government copter -- machine gun bullets SPARK through the steel wreckage, and the ones that hit Ben just skip off his rocky hide, annoying him more than hurting him.

As the copter banks around the building to make another pass, Ben reaches for the thirty-foot, four-ton crane arm --

BEN
Okay -- you wanna play King Kong? --

Ben twists and tears the crane arm loose --

BEN
-- It's **clobbering time.**

ON THE STREET - THE TELEVISION REPORTER AND CAMERAMAN

have focused the video camera on the top level, and whatever he shoots is being fed directly to the Jumbotron set, as it happens --

CAMERAMAN
Jesus -- there's some kind of bomb up there --
(view shifts to Ben)
That thing -- what's it doing?

The reporter looks at the monitor -- his jaw is hanging open --

REPORTER
I think he's pointing to right field --

INSIDE PURSUIT COPTER POV - ON THE TOP CRANE LEVEL - BEN

is doing exactly what the reporter described -- with one hand, he holds the crane arm on his shoulder like a baseball bat, and with the other hand, he's pointing in the famous Babe Ruth pose -- as the copter flies in, Ben takes a batter's stance, and **swings** --

-- and connects -- the cockpit caves in, the rotors bend in half, and the copter hurtles sideways out of control, until it SMASHES, roughly but intact, on the roof of an adjacent building. As --

REED STRETCHES UP FROM THE BOMB CASING

as Morlak prepares to step into his copter, which is now warmed up and lifting off. The timer is now down to **01:38:00 -- 01:37:00 --**

REED
It's over, Morlak! Deactivate the bomb!

Morlak looks over at Reed -- this dead-serious guy making demands, and looking like he's made of play-doh -- and he holds out the detonator's remote control at arm's length --

MORLAK
You want to deactivate the bomb?
(he tosses the remote)
Be my guest.

Morlak steps into the copter -- as it takes off of the platform --

THE REMOTE PLUMMETS INTO THE FRAMEWORK OF GIRDERS

-- it hits one, then bounces against another, ping-ponging back and forth -- it seems gone, but --

-- **Reed won't give up** -- with his feet anchored in a knot around a top girder, Reed fires himself down after the remote, stretching into a dozen different directions, his face and arm always just inches behind the remote -- until it is nearly within his grasp --

-- and it **shatters** into a thousand pieces against a steel girder --

THE TIMER

on the bomb casing is now down to **01:00:00 -- 00:59:00 --**

IN THE FRAMEWORK OF GIRDERS - REED

snaps back throught the maze, reversing himself through the dozen angles, finally getting back up to the bomb casing.

Reed carefully eyes the timer housing -- he has no tools, but he narrows a fingertip into a Phillips-head screwdriver -- rotating his finger, he takes the screws off the detonator casing -- as --

BELOW REED IN THE FRAMEWORK - **THE HUMAN TORCH**

streaks in through the girders, swerving in and around the tangle of girders -- until he looks over to the right, and sees the copter WHOPPING away from the skyscraper, clearly escaping.

Johnny **blasts** after the copter in an burst of plasma flame -- as --

REED

gets the timer housing off, and sees that the wires inside of the timer connect to nothing. Reed raps the casing -- it's hollow.

REED
The bomb's a phony --
(puzzling it out)
Then where's the real one?

ON THE STREET - THE TELEVISION CREW

literally doesn't know which way to turn -- the cameraman is trying to focus on the Torch, babbling excitedly --

CAMERAMAN
Holy shit -- that guy's on fire -- he's flying and he's on fire --

But the reporter is looking up in a different direction --

REPORTER
Hey -- how come the ball is dropping now?

UP ABOVE - CLOSE ON THE "HAPPY NEW YEAR" BALL

which is indeed lowering on the wire ahead of schedule: **this** is the bomb, hovering over an unsuspecting crowd -- the ball's activated timer is running down from **00:32:00 -- 00:31:00 --**

AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE - REED

looks over and sees the ball dropping seven hours early -- instantly, he realizes what's happening -- and his look of comprehension changes to one of horror -- because --

-- over on a roof, maybe one hundred yards from the bomb, is Sue.

REED
Oh my God --

ON THE TIMES SQUARE ROOF - SUE

has just been a spectator up to this point, but now she's directly in the middle of things as her radio comes to life --

REED (OVER RADIO)
-- Sue -- the bomb isn't in the construction site, it's in the New Year's ball -- and it's going to go off in twenty seconds.
(beat)
You've got to get clear -- **now** --

Sue's face first registers fear -- but then an idea --

SUE
No --
(determined)
-- I'm staying.

THE BALL

lowers on the wire -- the timer is now under twenty seconds --

ABOVE THE ROOFTOPS - THE ENCLAVE HELICOPTER

is in the midst of a firefight with Johnny -- Johnny throws a plasma fireball at the copter -- it connects, sticking to the windshield like a wad of napalm --

INSIDE THE HELICOPTER - THE FRANTIC PILOT

tries to get past Johnny, but Morlak grabs a machine gun --

MORLAK
No -- keep on him --

THE HELICOPTER BANKS AROUND AFTER JOHNNY - THE MACHINE GUN FIRES

at him, so close that the bullets **pierce the plasma trail** right behind him -- as --

AT THE BASE OF THE CONSTRUCTION SITE - THE FBI AGENTS

hear a terrible metallic SCREECHING from above -- like fingernails on a blackboard would be, if your fingernails were made of granite and the blackboard were made of steel -- they look up --

THE AGENTS' POV - **THE THING SLIDES DOWN A CORNER GIRDER**

with just his bare hands braking him, SPARKING against the metal -- finally --

-- Ben hits the foundation and creates a ten foot impact crater in the concrete -- without missing a beat, Ben turns to run down the street, leaving potholes and awed stares in his wake -- as --

THE BALL MOVES DOWN THE WIRE

-- and the metal sheathing pops off, revealing this is a bomb --

Below, the crowd realizes what's happening -- they look up, and start running and yelling in panic -- as

IN THE STREET - REED

is taking seven-league strides, stretching his legs to thirty feet so he can stilt his way up Broadway through the crowd --

REED (INTO RADIO)
(urgently)
Sue -- get out of there, now --

ON THE ROOF - SUE IS AT THE EDGE

a few hundred feet from the ball -- she knows it's all up to her --

SUE
(concentrating)
I -- I think I can stop it --

SUE'S POV - BELOW HER

is the bomb, ticking below ten seconds -- and over ten thousand people who will be flash-fried if she fails --

-- the edges of Sue's force-field become visible, forming over the still-moving bomb, which is now down to **00:04:00 -- 00:03:00** --

-- but the field breaks up and fizzles out over the ball --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

-- tense, saying nothing -- he can't distract her now --

CLOSE ON SUE'S FACE

She is actually breaking a sweat with the concentration -- she's never had to exert this much control before --

THE ENERGY FIELD

forms again around the bomb -- but it only covers it partially -- the bomb is down to **00:01:00 -- 00:00:00** --

-- and the first stage of the bomb **goes off** -- five hundred feet over the crowd, a golden cloud of flammable gas is hurled out --

-- but one split second later -- Sue's energy field successfully **forms an airtight globe** around the bomb's second stage -- the "igniter" detonates inside the energy field, harmlessly --

ON THE ROOF - SUE

nearly collapses from the effort -- but before she can relax --

REED (OVER RADIO)
Good work -- you've got to hold it in place --

SUE
I -- don't know how long I can --

ON THE STREET - REED

is joined by Ben, who lopes throught the awed, parting crowd --

REED
While the cloud's intact, even a spark could detonate it -- hold on on until it clears.

Ben looks up -- the cloud hangs within the skyscrapers -- and a few blocks away --

-- the Enclave helicopter is pursuing Johnny directly toward the leading edge of the cloud.

BEN
Okay, genius -- now what?

Reed starts thinking fast -- as --

FRONT ANGLE ON TORCH - JOHNNY

looks over his shoulder -- the helicopter is right behind him --

-- and **the gas cloud** is right ahead of him -- if he flies into it, it'll ignite, destroying the buildings. So Johnny does the only thing he can -- he **cuts his flame entirely --**

-- with Olympic poise and suicidal aplomb, Johnny throws his arms out for a spread-eagle **dive directly into the heart of the cloud --**

ON THE STREET - BEN

bends down towards the street to pick something up --

BEN
Y'know, Richards, I've wanted to do this since the day I met you --

Ben picks up Reed, who is now tightly packed into a ball -- Reed's reply is strained, because his face is now flattened --

REED
Stop fooling around, Ben -- we haven't one second to lose --

Ben cocks back an arm and hurls Reed upward --

VIEW DOWN FROM BUILDINGS - REED HURTLES UPWARD

-- ten, twenty, thirty stories, approximately the same size and shape as a medicine ball, his flattened face a study of concentration waiting for the right moment -- until --

-- Reed's body unfurls, widening like a sail between the buildings -- Reed anchors himself by stretching his arms and legs, tying them off on flagpoles and outcroppings --

-- as his body brakes, Reed uses his new sail-like shape to catch the wind and direct it up into the cloud --

VIEW ON THE CLOUD - IT FANS UPWARD WITH THE BREEZE

-- it's breaking up so that it no longer is at critical mass -- as the cloud jets upward --

JOHNNY IS DIVING THROUGH THE CLOUD

which we can see is now up above the buildings --

JOHNNY'S POV - FALLING THROUGH THE CLOUD

-- Reed, stretched out, is beneath him -- and the cloud is visibly jetting above him, no longer in a position to harm the buildings --

LONG SHOT - ON THE ENCLAVE HELICOPTER AND JOHNNY

-- The helicopter flies up to the leading edge of the cloud -- just as Johnny plummets toward the bottom edge of the cloud, over the tops of the skyscrapers -- until --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S SMILING FACE

Without yelling -- as a quiet understatement, almost a whisper --

JOHNNY
-- flame on --

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CLOUD - THE TORCH FLAMES ON

igniting the lower edge of the cloud -- a tremendous sheet of flame travels up backwards to --

THE ENCLAVE HELICOPTER - WINDSHIELD POV OF AN **INFERNO**

coming up fast -- the last thing Morlak sees is the same fiery end he planned for thousands, rushing up towards him --

LONG SHOT - **THE HELICOPTER IS INCINERATED IN THE SHEET OF FIRE**

and the conflagration sets off other scattered traces of the gas, but at this point, it's not harmful: what could have been Hell in New York is now just a fireworks display. Speaking of which --

THE HUMAN TORCH BLAZES LOW OVER BROADWAY

-- SHOUTING and LAUGHING, without a doubt the happiest adrenalin junkie of all time, flying just over head level -- with one hand unflamed, he grabs a cigar from a newsstand shelf as he zips by --

ON THE TIMES SQUARE ROOF - SUE COLLAPSES

from the effort of holding the field -- but before she can fall --

-- Reed stretches up over the ledge -- his feet are on the ground, his torso is twenty stories up. Overcome with relief, Reed catches Sue in his arms for an impassioned embrace: his arms loop around her body several times, and he gently lowers her down to --

THE MIDDLE OF BROADWAY - REED AND SUE DRAW DOWN TO STREET LEVEL

-- locked in a kiss and totally oblivious to everything, including the awed crowd around them. Johnny streaks down for a landing feet first, shutting off his flame -- laughing, he shoves the cigar in Ben's mouth and flicks a mini-fireball at the end, igniting it.

Ben draws in the first hit of the cigar as if it were pure oxygen -- as a crowd of reporters and news photographers surge toward the four heroes, off one camera's FLASH, we --

CUT TO:

A NEW YORK POST FRONT PAGE - A PHOTO OF THE FOUR

is under the headline: "**FANTASTIC FOUR HALT MIDTOWN MELTDOWN!**"

CUT TO:

A LOCAL TELEVISION BROADCAST - THE ANCHOR

is reporting over footage of the Fantastic Four in action --

ANCHOR
-- The Phoenix astronauts who the press has dubbed "the Fantastic Four" were in fact physically altered while in space --

Over a shot of MacLehr dodging press as he gets out of a car --

ANCHOR
-- Government spokesmen had no comment about the false cover story that they had been killed after their crash landing.

The footage cuts back to the anchor, behind a desk -- as a graphic in the corner reads "**WARTORN LATVERIA**" --

ANCHOR
In world news: overseas, a violent coup has taken place in the Eastern European republic of Latveria. Details are sketchy, but the democratic government apparently has been unseated by a shadowy figure claiming to be the nation's rightful monarch --

CUT TO:

INT. LAWYER'S CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - REED, SUE, BEN AND JOHNNY

are in this well-appointed conference room, with a picture window view of Manhattan, to meet a LAWYER who looks extremely nervous about being around them. He's openly gaping at Ben, who is wearing a Fedora and a suit that is literally bursting at the seams, and is slumped in an oversized couch that GROANS under his weight.

Ben lights a cigar as the lawyer tries to regain his composure, sipping from a glass of water --

LAWYER
Now -- if you could explain to me again what it is you want --

REED
It's simple. I've always wanted to put my scientific gifts to work for the betterment of humanity -- but --

BEN
No doubt about it, rubberneck -- you got modesty to spare.

The lawyer gapes at Ben again as he draws on his cigar -- Ben catches him, and the lawyer abruptly looks away, back to Reed.

REED
-- the only backing I could get for the enormous scientific projects I've envisioned came from the military. Up to now. What's happened to us is clearly an opportunity to help all of mankind -- but on my terms.

As Reed rattles on, the lawyer's eyes drift back towards Ben -- he can't help himself -- but by now Ben is annoyed --

BEN
Is my cigar bothering you, pal?

Startled, the lawyer drops his water glass -- but before it can hit the floor, Reed's arm shoots across the room to catch it, and as the spilled water falls, Sue projects a force field around it --

-- as Reed hands the stunned lawyer the glass, and Sue "pours" the water back into it, Reed keeps talking as if nothing has happened.

REED
-- as I said, I think we have an opportunity -- but we need financing.

LAWYER
Of course -- of course --
(finally snaps out of it)
First, we need to start a corporation -- say, "Fantastic Four, Inc.". With your, uh, skills, I'm sure financing won't be a problem.
(starts writing)
Next, we'll copyright your original DNA --

Ben tilts his hat down over his eyes and leans back in the couch -- the long, long meeting grinds on, as we CUT TO:

A TELEVISION NEWS REPORT - REED IS AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

where the fight occurred. As Reed talks to foremen, we hear --

ANCHOR (V.O.)
-- it was announced today that the Fantastic Four has purchased the top four floors of the same midtown skyscraper they saved from destruction one month ago. Construction has halted for several weeks for Dr. Reed Richards to redesign the building's interior for advanced scientific research.

TELEVISION - "DISCOVERY" CHANNEL - REED

is shown walking around his labs, very seriously pointing at incomprehensible, unimaginable machines he's built --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Tonight, on "Next Step": an in-depth visit with Reed Richards at his New York laboratories to discuss his plans to start the future a little ahead of schedule --

-- The media montage ends as we GO TO:

EXT. **FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA** - DAY - THE TOP OF THE SKYSCRAPER

is the most modern, high-tech feature of the Manhattan skyline. Forty-four stories high, it comes to a spectacular point as the design narrows into four gigantic "4"s at the top. We MOVE DOWN the skyscraper to find --

ON THE SIDEWALK - JOHNNY AND BEN WALK UP THE STREET

Ben, in his trenchcoat and hat, is trying not to be noticed and is having no luck. Johnny, of course, is in a new Armani suit and is definitely trying to draw attention: a KID trails along, and Johnny signs an 8x10 as he walks. But not with a pen --

-- with a pinpoint flame shooting from a fingertip, he etches his name into the photo. Johnny proudly hands it to the awed kid --

JOHNNY
Here you go, son --

The kid runs off, as Johnny and Ben pass a newsstand with racks equally crowded by two things: newspapers screaming "SHOWDOWN IN LATVERIA", and all sorts of Fantastic Four souvenir items -- t-shirts, comic books, fanzines, and so on. This irks Johnny --

JOHNNY
Look at all this bootleg stuff -- we don't make a nickel on it.

BEN
(couldn't care less)
You're right, kid -- it's downright criminal.

Johnny tries to see what's officially licensed and what isn't -- and Ben's attention wanders across the street -- he sees --

BEN'S POV - ACROSS THE STREET - **CARLENE**

is there, dressed to kill -- she hasn't seen Ben yet --

CLOSE ON BEN

-- Ben smiles, forgetting what happened just for a moment at the sight of her -- he's about to raise a hand and wave -- but

BEN'S POV - CARLENE SEES BEN

and abruptly breaks eye contact, turning away as her new, handsome BOYFRIEND steps out of a shop. They walk down the street -- he doesn't know Ben is there, and she's hurrying him away to make sure he doesn't spot him. She gives Ben a goodbye look that is simultaneously pitying -- apologetic -- and final.

CLOSE ON BEN

Ben is devastated -- his face shows how crushed he is, but Johnny has missed this whole thing as he scans the souvenirs --

JOHNNY
-- I mean, you can't copyright the number "4", but this is ridiculous. Right?
(no response, looks up)
Hey -- hey, Benny -- you want to get the wax out of where your ears used to be?

Ben is still blank -- and Johnny instantly regrets the last crack.

JOHNNY
(softens a little)
Come on, Ben -- let's grab a beer in the green room or something.

Before they can get moving, though, there is the SOUND of GUNSHOTS and SCREAMS about a block up the street. Pedestrians are in a panic -- one of them runs headlong into Ben --

BEN
What's goin' on?

FLEEING CITIZEN
(pointing up street)
Bank robbers -- they've hijacked a Brinks truck!

The man runs away into the crowd, as Ben looks up the Avenue --

AN ARMORED CAR

is about two blocks up, speeding toward them -- other cars pull out of their way as SHOTS are FIRED -- a few cops are on foot behind them, but they can do nothing to stop the car --

BEN AND JOHNNY

Ben, happy for the distraction, strips to the waist --

BEN
Looks like we're on, kid --

JOHNNY
Ah, the police can handle it --
(indicates clothes)
I'm late for the taping, and I just bought this outfit --

BEN
(exasperated)
All right, junior -- I wouldn't want you to get a crease in your skirt --

Ben shoves his coat and hat at Johnny, and steps into the street --

IN THE STREET - THE THING

looks ahead to the speeding armored car -- all that's between him and the accelerating car is about a hundred yards of pavement --

IN THE ARMORED CAR - THE BANK ROBBERS LOOK AHEAD

through the slotted windshield at Ben, standing, waiting --

ROBBER #1
What the hell is that?

ROBBER #2
It's the Thing -- run him down --

THE LEAD ARMORED CAR ACCELERATES

-- it's four tons of steel moving at fifty miles an hour -- the coming impact has got to hurt even the Thing -- but --

BEN STANDS HIS GROUND

undisturbed -- he just makes a fist and readies for the impact --

ON THE STREET - THE CROWD

CHEERS the Thing -- and that's the last straw for Johnny. He drops Ben's coat and hat, and gives his suit one last look --

JOHNNY
This wasn't my color anyway --
(yells)
-- Flame on!

With that, Johnny ignites -- and about $4,000 worth of clothes go up in an explosion of plasma flame as he streaks down the street --

IN THE STREET - BEN

is ready for the car's impact -- but the Human Torch rockets by him, knocking Ben off balance and on his ass --

HIGH ANGLE ON THE ARMORED CAR

They want no part of this fight -- the car pulls a fast U-turn to try to escape -- but before it can get too far --

-- **the Human Torch streaks over, tracking with the car about thirty feet up** -- the Torch dives down --

ANGLE FOLLOWING TORCH

-- flying in a circle around the armored car, the Torch lobs **four fireballs at each of the car's tires** --

-- the fireballs **instantly melt the rubber** -- and the car's rims GRIND it to a halt on the street. The Torch pitches two more fireballs that seal the armored car's doors shut -- and with the thieves now immobilized and helpless, a group of policemen advance, their guns out, to finish the job.

ON THE STREET - THE CROWD CHEERS

as the Torch salutes the crowd with a wave and a double loop --

-- but the Thing is still on his ass, now forgotten by the crowd. As the CHEERS get louder and the Torch streaks out of sight, Ben rolls his eyes, and gets up. A PRESS contingent arrives -- most shoot the Torch's exit, but a tabloid PHOTOGRAPHER chases Ben --

PHOTOGRAPHER
Hey! Hey, Thing! Do you use a shower or a sandblaster? The world wants to know --

Ben casually crushes his camera lens as he walks past -- and we --

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL - IN A BUSY CORRIDOR - SUE

stands under an office sign reading "**CELLULAR RESEARCH LAB - SUSAN STORM**", looking at her watch impatiently while trying not to look annoyed. It's not working. DR. PAUL STANTON -- a smooth, handsome doctor who thinks a lot more of himself than Sue does, sees an opening. Smiling, he moves in closer than Sue would like him to --

STANTON
Waiting for Richards? Again?
(she can't deny it)
I don't know why you put up with that guy.
But at least now we're both free for lunch.

Before Sue can turn him down, a breathless NURSE runs up --

NURSE
Dr. Stanton -- it's your patient in 306.
You've got to come quickly --

Stanton abruptly follows the nurse, leaving behind Sue, who looks concerned. She can hear them as they disappear down the hallway --

STANTON
I thought she was exaggerating about the pain -- what happened?

NURSE
She's gone into umbilical prolapse -- she could lose the baby --

The look on Sue's face shows this touches a chord -- as we CUT TO:

HOSPITAL ROOM 306 - A GROUP OF DOCTORS AND NURSES

are crowded around a very PREGNANT WOMAN, writhing in both physical and emotional anguish -- a fetal monitor is BEEPING a shrill alarm as Stanton and the nurse rush in --

NURSE
-- the cord's so tangled that the oxygen flow's been cut off to the baby --

STANTON
(serious, but quiet)
Okay -- we're going to have to cut her open --

Stanton nods to an anasthesiologist, waiting with an epidural.

NURSE
(challenging)
There isn't enough time for surgery --

STANTON
There isn't another choice --

SUE (O.S.)
Yes there is --

Sue bursts in, and shoves past Stanton and the other personnel, reaching the bed. She motions the anasthesiologist aside, and turns to the woman, trying for a calming tone of voice --

SUE
Hello --
(looks at chart)
-- Rene. Listen, I'm going to help you out here -- can you close your eyes for me?

Rene is in full-blown panic, but seems just a little calmer with Sue in charge -- she nods, and shuts her eyes, as Sue puts her hands on Rene's stomach -- she **projects a field of invisibility** that clears Rene's abdomen, **layer by layer** --

CLOSE ON SUE

-- she's completely focused on trying to do two things at once: maintaining the invisibility, and manipulating her force field --

THE DOCTORS LOOK ON IN AMAZEMENT

-- and whisper, as the fetal monitor drops its distress BEEP --

DOCTOR #1
-- she's untangling the cord -- incredible --

NURSE
-- I've never seen anything like it --

STANTON
-- how do we bill the insurance on this? --

AT THE BED - SUE

breathes a sigh of relief -- the vital signs on the fetal monitor have returned to normal. She turns to Rene --

SUE
It's okay -- you can open them now.

Rene opens her eyes, but she's still frantic --

RENE
My baby -- is he --

Sue smiles, exhilarated with an idea --

SUE
Would you like to see?

Rene is taken aback at first -- but then she nods. Sue turns back to the medical personnel --

SUE
Excuse us a minute --

Sue's force field whips the privacy curtain around the bed, meaning we can only see their silhoettes, as the silhoette of Rene's abdomen mostly vanishes, with a baby's eight month old silhoette floating in its place --

BEHIND THE CURTAIN - CLOSE ON RENE'S FACE

We can't see the baby, but we can see how happy Rene is --

RENE
He's -- he's perfect --

CLOSE ON SUE'S FACE

She's exhausted, and thrilled -- but she thinks of something that hadn't occurred to her before. Her smile drops a little -- as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. LOWER MIDTOWN - DAY - BEN

is walking down the sidewalk, alone, miserable.

BEN'S POV - THE SIDEWALK CROWD AHEAD OF HIM

The faces change, but the reactions of the people who hurl themselves out of his way are always exactly the same. Men fear him. Children laugh at him. Women are revolted by him.

BEN

is sick of the stares -- and he veers down a garbage-strewn alley. Once he starts moving down the alley, though, he sees at the end --

-- the papparazzi seen earlier drive by, looking for the Thing.

In no mood for a fight or a photo, Ben ducks into a doorway, and --

BEN ENTERS A ROOMY, DUSTY STUDIO WORKSPACE

lit only by the sun pouring in from a skylight. The space is full of a dozen sculptures, all under dropcloths. Ben pulls the door shut behind him -- and from the other end of the workspace --

ALICIA (O.S.)
(nice but direct)
Thanks for coming in -- but I'm still working on these. The opening's tomorrow, okay?

Between the statues and the dim light, Ben can't see who's talking.

BEN
Sorry. I'll get outta your way in a minute -- as soon as those photographers clear out.

She walks out -- it's a nice silhoette, but her face stays hidden.

ALICIA
("impressed")
"Photographers"? What, are you a movie star having a bad toup day or something?

Ben turns toward the voice, pissed off --

BEN
Yeah. I'm the blue-eyed idol of millions. And you're either a comedian or you're b--

Before Ben can finish, ALICIA MASTERS steps into full view. Her eyes are as beautiful as the rest of her, but they don't catch light. They never have and never will.

ALICIA
(comfortable with it)
Blind.
(lightly)
Don't tell anyone else, okay?

Ben now feels dumber than he looks -- he opens the door --

BEN
Listen -- I'm sorry I stomped in like this. I'll get out, and --

ALICIA
(friendly)
I don't like being photographed either. I never get to see how the shots turn out.

ALICIA
(beat)
Why don't you hang out for a few minutes and I'll give you the first look at the show?

Ben doesn't need to be asked twice. He turns around, as we GO TO --

INT. A NEW YORK RESTAURANT - DAY - REED AND SUE

are seated at a window booth, with no food -- their WAITER zips by, in spite of Reed's attempts to get his attention --

REED
There he goes again -- am I invisible now?
(turns back to Sue)
Sorry I was late. I got hung up in the lab.

SUE
(very slight edge)
I'm getting used to it.

Reed nods, knowing he had that coming. But he's got something on his mind -- he looks serious, even by his standards.

REED
I know. That's what I wanted to talk about.
(beat)
We've put the wedding off now -- what -- three times?

SUE
Four.

REED
Four -- right -- well, it's just that -- I keep thinking about what happened to Victor.
(beat)
I don't want to end up like him.

SUE
(understanding)
We all could've died, Reed --

REED
No, no -- I mean, I don't want to be like him, you know?
(beat)
All he cared about was his work. He was great at being a scientist, pretty lousy at everything else, and sometimes that seems a little too familiar.
(sincere)
I guess what I'm saying is, I want to try to have a normal life --

As he says this, the waiter again speeds by, with no intention of stopping -- Reed abruptly shoots out an arm to grab the waiter's shoulder seven feet away -- the waiter turns, astounded --

REED
(a little impatient)
I'll have the grilled lemon sole, please.

SUE
Spinach salad -- Italian dressing.
(he leaves)
You were saying you wanted a "normal" life.

Reed retracts his arm, realizing he's not making his point --

REED
No. I need a normal life, after all this.
(building up to it)
So -- I know I put it off before the launch, and we've been busy since, but -- do you want to get married? As soon as we can?

Sue is happy to hear all this -- but something still bothers her --

SUE
Yes -- but --

REED
(light)
"Yes, but"? Now, that's the enthusiasm I hoped for -- what's the matter?

SUE
I've been thinking too -- we always talked about kids, before -- you know, before --
(worried)
-- what are they going to turn out like?

REED
(smiles)
Well -- they're going to be smart. Good looking, too. Champs at hide and seek -- able to catch pop flies at fifty feet --

SUE
(serious)
-- or they may look like Ben. Or worse.
(beat)
I mean, I got nominated for a Nobel prize for this stuff two years ago, and I don't really understand everything that's happened to our bodies. I don't even know what our lifespans are, much less what's happened to our genes.

Reed hadn't considered this before -- he takes Sue's hand --

REED
So -- does that mean you don't want to --

SUE
(cuts him off)
I want to. We just -- might need some help.
(beat)
There's a specialist in genetic mutations in town for a conference -- his name's Dr. Haden, and I know he's going back to Switzerland later this week. I could try to get us an appointment with him tomorrow --

REED
Then do it.
(reassuring)
We'll figure it out. I promise.

Reed squeezes Sue's hand -- she smiles -- and --

OUTSIDE VIEW OF WINDOW FROM SIDEWALK - REED AND SUE

are staring at each other, happy -- to all appearances, just any another couple in love -- as we CUT TO:

INT. ALICIA'S STUDIO - DAY - THE SCULPTURES

have mostly been uncovered -- they're all large, stone-carved sculptures of different, relatively ordinary people. What makes them spectacular is the meticulously realistic detail of each one.

Alicia tears off a dropcloth, revealing a stoop-shouldered man on a bench feeding pigeons. As Ben looks around, you can see he's very impressed with all the statues -- and with Alicia. What's more important: as they move around the statues, Ben deliberately is keeping some distance from Alicia. She's treating him like an ordinary guy, and he wants to prolong it for as long as possible.

BEN
(he means her, not the statue)
Beautiful.

ALICIA
(shrugs it off)
Ehh. I think that one might be too -- too community college, you know? Now, this one --

Alicia quickly doubles back to tear off another dropcloth -- and to make sure she doesn't touch him, Ben steps back too fast, and he bumps into another statue, which starts to wobble. Ben reaches up to steady it, and Alicia shoots her arms up too --

ALICIA
Whoa! Careful --

-- but as the statue is steadied, Alicia's hands move along the stone, until they reach Ben's hand and arm. Her hand moves all the way down Ben's arm -- her expression shows how surprised she is --

ALICIA
I know who you are --
(beat)
-- one of the astronauts. From the accident.

Ben, totally deflated, pulls away, thinking his moment of normalcy is over. But she doesn't look horrified or frightened at all.

ALICIA
Everybody calls you the Fantastic Four now, right? You're heroes.

BEN
(flat)
We're a sideshow act. Period.

Alicia moves closer to Ben again -- she knows he's upset, she knows why, and she wants to reach him before he gets out the door.

ALICIA
Like I said before -- I'm having an opening here tomorrow. Would you like to come?

BEN
Sure. Your artist buddies'd probably think it's hip to have a walkin', talkin' gargoyle at the party, huh?
(small, bitter laugh)
Thanks for the "offer", kid.

Before Alicia can reply, Ben is out the door -- and gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. **FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA** - TOP LEVELS - SUNSET

The sun is going down behind the Manhattan skyline -- and --

IN REED AND SUE'S LIVING QUARTERS - SUE

is at a balcony, watching the sunset -- but she turns into the room as Reed walks in, fatigued, rubbing his neck. Sue is happy to see him -- and is obviously anxious for some time alone with him.

SUE
Are you done for tonight?

REED
No -- just taking a break.

Reed plops into a chair, as Sue moves behind him --

SUE
Good news. Dr. Haden's leaving for Europe tomorrow, but he said he'd see us at eleven, on one condition --
(smiles)
-- that we get Johnny's autograph for his daughter.

Sue rubs Reed's shoulders -- it's like kneading hard rubber.

SUE
You're tense -- what is it?

REED
It's Ben. I'm working on his -- condition --
(twists neck around)
-- but -- it's tough. When the rest of us went through, we just got one cycle, and one transformation. Ben got dozens of cycles -- transformations upon transformations.
(pitying)
I don't think there's ever going to be a way to reverse them.
(starts to get up)
I've got to get back to work --

But as Reed tries to rise, Sue playfully holds him down --

SUE
Are you sure you don't want to take the night off?

REED
I can't. I want to try an experiment --

SUE
(smiling)
Me too --

Sue bends down and cuts off Reed's protest with a long, long kiss -- and he gives up. Who wouldn't. As Reed officially decides to take the night off -- we see --

BACK IN A CORRIDOR - **BEN**

is watching them -- and from the expression on his face, we know two things. One is that he'd give anything for this kind of moment. The other is he heard Reed's assessment of his condition.

Ben turns to slink off down the corridor -- and as he goes, he passes the "Worldwatch" room, which is stuffed with monitors and televisions to follow world situations. We LINGER on one TV --

TELEVISION NEWS REPORT - A NEWS REPORTER IN THE FIELD

is somewhere in rural Eastern Europe --

REPORTER
-- tensions are escalating, but all we know is that Latveria's ruler, a reclusive dictator known as Doctor Doom, has issued an ultimatum to other nations on its border: that they surrender their governments to him, or face total destruction. NATO refuses to confirm reports that they're responding to this with air attacks. The most striking thing about the standoff is the total lack of information. Borders are closed, and there is no communication --
(at a loss for words)
-- yet, there are bizarre, impossible rumors of repression on a level never imagined --

CUT TO:

EXT. LATVERIA - DOOMSTADT TOWN SQUARE - DAY

This town square of Doomstadt looks like any travel brochure photo of a European village built in the sixteenth century -- it is quaint, inviting, and peaceful. Very peaceful. Too peaceful.

The citizens go about their business quietly, but with a unreality to their silence: they are afraid to speak, their defeated eyes glued to the ground. The reason why flies overhead --

A HOVERING ROBOT SPY

with a roving camera mounted in its belly flies fifteen feet overhead, silently monitoring the town.

CUT TO:

EXT. **CASTLE DOOM** - DAY

Outside, the castle, situated on a mountain, is as nightmarish as anything found in Grimm's Fairy Tales -- but

INSIDE THE CASTLE - THE THRONE ROOM

is closer to Jane's Defense Weekly. There is a mix of opulent, regal European splendor, and machinery as alien and unfathomable as if it had come from the twenty-fifth century.

In the center of the room -- a throne, atop a dozen foot pyramid of gold and velvet, surrounded by an electronic cocoon of video monitors and computer screens. A darkened figure sits there, deep in thought -- before we can see him clearly --

A PAIR OF OAKEN DOORS

fly open -- and a worried, breathless aide, HAUPTMANN, runs in.

HAUPTMANN
Our perimeter radar shows that a pair of fighter planes are --

DOOM (O.S.)
Silence.

The word reverberates throughout the room -- the soulless, pitiless voice is modulated into something that is half-human, half-machine. We still can't see him clearly -- our view is with Hauptmann, who freezes at Doom's command.

DOOM
(undisturbed)
I am aware of their primitive advance. They may as well attack me with catapults and broadswords. My automated defenses will deal with the slight nuisance they present.

VIEW FROM MOUNTAIN PEAK - **THREE F-18S** STREAK OVERHEAD

-- but as they do -- a rack of four ground to air missiles of an unusual design swivel in synch with the planes and **launch** --

INSIDE THE SQUADRON LEADER'S PLANE - THE INSTRUMENT PANEL

shows the launch of the missiles --

GROUP LEADER (OVER RADIO)
G-to-A bogies fired from south -- scatter --

HIGH SHOT - THE PLANES SCATTER

But **each missile bullets through the countermeasures** to unerringly pursue, and overtake their target plane --

INSIDE ONE PLANE - A PILOT

looks back and sees the missile directly on his tail --

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
Bogey is on my six -- trying to evade --

The missile is clearly catching up -- but it comes up to the plane and **passes the canopy** -- the pilot is sure he's dead --

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
-- no good, it's on me --

The missile **detonates ahead of the plane**, throwing out a thick gaseous cloud that the jet blazes through --

HIGH ANGLE - **ALL OF THE MISSILES**

do the same thing -- overtake their target plane and detonate in what appears to be an anticlimactic cloud of smoke -- but --

INSIDE ONE OF THE PLANES - VIEW OUT CANOPY WINDSHIELD

Something is happening to the glass, where it came into contact with the soot -- the glass is being **eaten away**, as if by an invisible acid, layer by molecular layer --

The pilot sees what's going on -- but before he can even realize he's in trouble, the weakening glass shatters --

-- and Mach Two wind pins the pilot against his seat -- as the plane goes out of control, all he can move is his terrified eyes --

PILOT POV - THE PLANE'S INSTRUMENT PANELS

are being rapidly **erased from existance** at the molecular level --

HIGH SHOT OF THE OTHER PLANES

The **same thing is happening** -- where the nano-payload struck, it is **molecularly disassembling** all of the planes --

-- The left wing of one plane looks as if it's made of jigsaw pieces that are vanishing -- it snaps off at it's weak point, causing the jet to flip over, colliding with the jet nearest him --

-- both planes tangle and explode in a somersaulting shower of wreckage -- as --

IN THE SQUADRON LEADER'S PLANE - THE LEADER

can't believe what he sees -- the same silent disintegration streaks across with amazing speed -- both wings are ready to go. The leader strains to reach the "EJECT" lever -- as --

BOTH OF THE WINGS SHEAR OFF SIMULTANEOUSLY

and the plane's fuselage spirals down like a unaimed missile toward a granite peak -- the ejection seat rockets out a split second before the fuselage impacts against the mountainside --

-- the seat, smoking from the ejection rocket, tumbles until the chute billows open, jerking him to a halt --

CLOSE ON THE LEADER DANGLING FROM THE PARACHUTE

He seems comparitively safe -- but he looks down -- and sees --

THE PLANE'S SEAT

is disintegrating under nano-assault -- everything that's inorganic is being attacked, including the pilot's sleeve -- above him, the chute's straps and the chute itself fall apart --

-- the chair finally collapses -- the leader falls to his death, SCREAMING -- as the last of the chute and chair tumble after him, they dissolve into nothingness in mid-fall -- As --

INSIDE CASTLE DOOM - OVERLOOKING A BATTLEMENT VIEW

We are behind Doom -- we see he has been watching this with slight remorse, as plumes of smoke rise over the distant mountains.

DOOM
So unnecessary. These infants have far to go.

With that, we MOVE AROUND for our first full look at

DOCTOR DOOM

His gleaming silver armor isn't the Tin Man outfit of the early comics. It's streamlined, with alien features: Samurai armor as designed by H.R. Giger, with occasional molecular **rippling** that indicates this is a fluid, nanotech construct. Only the insane, ravaged eyes behind the mask hint that a man is at its core.

DOOM
The time has come to lead them into the new millenium.

DOOM
(beat)
The time has come for the entire world to look upon the face of Doom.

CUT TO:

A TELEVISION SCREEN - OVER A STUDIO AUDIENCE - **JOHNNY**

is flying rings over and around a gasping studio audience -- after flying around it twice, Johnny flames off for a showy landing on --

A SOUNDSTAGE - DAVID LETTERMAN

waits, impressed -- the band plays "Hot Blooded", the audience APPLAUDS like crazy, and Johnny grins, as at ease with his celebrity as your average rock star.

JOHNNY
Everybody always complains about how cold it is in here --
(turns to audience)
-- you guys think I ought to turn up the heat a little more?

Amid wild, out of control CHEERING, Johnny flames on and flies a victory lap above the audience -- as we go to --

INT. A DINGY YANCY STREET BAR - BEN

is in his traditional hat and trenchcoat, sitting at the end of the virtually empty bar, with a beer mug in front of him, stonily looking up at the TV hanging in the ceiling's corner --

Down at the other end of the bar, a BARTENDER delivers a sotto voce warning to a MAN in a "Yancy Street Gang" bowling shirt --

BARTENDER
Better hang back. He's in a bad mood tonight.

THE LETTERMAN SHOW - JOHNNY AND LETTERMAN

are now seated -- Letterman starts counting on his fingers --

LETTERMAN
-- so, let me get this Fantastic Four deal straight. There's you, the Human Torch -- there's your sister, the Invisible Woman --
("can't remember")
-- there's -- uh -- Captain Stretchy --

JOHNNY
-- Mister Fantastic. I think that should have been my name, but tell that to the Post --

LETTERMAN
-- and -- uh -- the other one --
(snaps fingers to remember)
-- Agent Orange -- you know, the big monkey you hang out with --

The SOUND of abruptly broken glass takes us out of the show --

AT THE BAR - BEN HAS **CRUSHED THE BEER MUG**

-- powdered glass granules drain from his hand --

JOHNNY (ON TV)
I can't believe you called him that. You're going to get a lot of mail from your monkey audience on that one.

ON THE LETTERMAN SHOW - JOHNNY AND LETTERMAN

pause as the audience has a big laugh at Ben's expense --

LETTERMAN
So, he's called The Thing, right? Now, is he a mascot, or -- ?

JOHNNY
Be fair, Dave. He's a big part of the team. He's not the brightest guy in the world, but he's so damn handsome we figured he'd be good for the team's image.

Over more audience LAUGHTER -- we go back to --

THE YANCY STREET BAR - BEN IS STALKING OUT

-- with each step, glasses and bottles in the racks RATTLE --

LETTERMAN (ON TV)
Enough about rock-boy -- I understand that on the way over to the program, you actually stopped a bank robbery single-handedly --

JOHNNY (ON TV)
That's right, Dave --

ON THE STREET - A TAXI

is nearing -- on the curb, Ben raises his arm and growls --

BEN
Taxi!

The taxi slows down as it grows closer -- but when the DRIVER sees Ben, he abruptly floors the accelerator and takes off --

-- spraying a puddle all over Ben. Ben takes this stoically -- and starts a long, long walk toward the skyscrapers of New York.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - IN THE BOTTOM COURTYARD - MORNING

Two BOYS are in front of the entrance, in the middle of a heated trading card swap -- as with every one of these trades that's ever taken place, one kid has a much better hand than the other.

KID #1
Okay, I'll give you two Things for a Torch --

KID #2
So sorry, my friend. I guess you didn't hear the Thing market has crashed. Today's going rate is three Things for one Torch --

But a dark shadow passes over the kids, as the rythmic thudding of Ben's walk nears. The kids look up, see Ben, and run for their lives. Ben clearly heard them, but he unswervingly moves on --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

which is unreadable, but determined. Ben walks into the lobby, past a RECEPTIONIST who tries in vain to wave Ben down -- until --

INT. AN ELEVATOR DOOR OPENS - BEN

looks out the door -- he has arrived at --

THE FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA GARAGE - **JOHNNY'S 1962 PORSCHE**

is sitting in a space under a metal plate that reads "RESERVED FOR JOHNATHAN STORM". The car is cherry red and is perfectly, meticulously restored -- even in garage light, the paint gleams --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

as his equally gleaming smile GRINDS across his face -- we GO TO --

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - DAY - THE LIVING ROOM

sports the sort of bachelor flash you'd expect from Johnny: a lot of overdesigned electronics and furniture fill the place. Right now, Johnny is smugly sitting back in a couch, a phone in one hand, the other doodling a flaming dollar sign in the air --

JOHNNY
-- Well, they saw the show, right? Letterman's already asked me back, and I'm hosting "Saturday Night Live" next week --
(beat)
-- Tell those guys that if they want me to skywrite "Diet Coke" over the Super Bowl crowd, they've got to step up to the price --

IN THE HALLWAY - LOW ANGLE ON BEN'S FEET

as he walks, THOOMING, through the hallway --

IN JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - JOHNNY

has his hand over one ear, annoyed by the approaching THOOMING sound of Ben walking down the hall --

JOHNNY
What? I can't hear you -- hold on a second --
(puts phone down, shouts)
You want to keep it down out there, please?

The stomping stops. The hall is silent. Johnny picks up the phone.

JOHNNY
Sorry about that. It's like bunking with a Tyrannosaurus Rex here --
(beat)
-- No -- the Vegas deal has to guarantee I get thirty percent of the --

In mid-demand, Johnny is cut off by a deafening metallic CRASH right outside his door. Johnny, furious, tosses the phone away --

JOHNNY
Okay -- that tears it --

Johnny stalks over to the door and throws it open -- revealing

THE CRUSHED PORSCHE

is sitting in front of the door -- it has been folded into a perfect two foot by two foot by two foot cube, with the metal "RESERVED FOR JOHNATHAN STORM" sign neatly mashed onto the top.

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S REDDENING FACE

-- as fury turns to fire --

FOLLOWING THE TORCH - JOHNNY FLIES THROUGH THE HALLS

-- passing bizarre rooms stuffed with inexplicable machinery designed by Reed. A enormous sound of CLANKING leads him to --

THE FOUR FREEDOMS GYM - A NONCHALANT BEN

is in the middle of a gigantic exercise machine that is as big as an entire Gold's gym: it is an odd but formidable collection of gears and weights. Ben is calmly working though some pec reps --

-- when a **fireball** singes through a cable, releasing the tension with an explosive **BANG** -- and Johnny, furious, flies into view.

JOHNNY
You want a workout, ugly? Let's go --

BEN
You been askin' for it all week, Flame Brain, and I'm just too big-hearted not to give ya a double helping --

Ben calmly gets out of the machine, completely unruffled -- as --

ELSEWHERE IN THE COMPLEX - REED AND SUE'S BEDROOM

Muffled BANGS and THUDS awaken Reed first, then Sue --

SUE
(groggy)
What's -- happening?

REED
(peeved)
What else --

BACK IN THE GYM - JOHNNY

is literally flying rings around Ben, **hurling** fireballs at Ben -- they don't really hurt him, but he has to shake off the napalm-like goo. Johnny is flying just out of Ben's reach --

-- until Ben brings his hands together for a powerful, thunderous **clap** -- the **shockwave** from the clap knocks Johnny off-balance and against a wall. Dazed, Johnny's flame goes out as he falls onto a throw rug -- as Ben advances on him, we go back to --

REED AND SUE'S BEDROOM

-- where the horrible THUDS have only gotten worse --

SUE
(still sleepy)
Aren't you going to stop them?

REED
No --

He stretches across the room for a pillow to pull over his head --

REED
Maybe, if we're lucky, this time they really will kill each other --

BACK IN THE GYM - A LAUGHING BEN

has rolled up Johnny in the carpet like a burrito --

BEN
Here you go, hot-shot -- test-pilot this --

Ben throws the carpet through the window like a dart --

OUTSIDE THE FOUR FREEDOMS BUILDING - JOHNNY REIGNITES

his flame, **burning through the carpet** -- it **explodes** off of him -- and now madder than ever, he turns and flies back in the window --

INSIDE THE GYM - JOHNNY AND BEN FACE OFF

-- with Johnny flying around Ben, flinging down fireballs -- the fight is interrupted with the intrusion of --

THE FOUR FREEDOMS RECEPTIONIST

who is nervously clutching the envelope he waved at Ben earlier --

RECEPTIONIST
Mr. Grimm -- a w-woman left this for you --

Ben ends the fight by lightly backhanding Johnny, who flips out of frame to CRASH against a wall. Ben sourly STOMPS over for the envelope, which he snatches out of the receptionist's hand. It's nice stationary -- Ben sniffs it, and we see it's scented, too. Ben's thumb flicks the wax off the seal, and opens it --

BEN
Probably Carly's adorable way of askin' for her stuff back --

INSIDE THE ENVELOPE - A **FORMAL INVITATION**

reads, in delicate caligraphy:

MISS ALICIA MASTERS

FORMALLY REQUESTS THE PRESENCE

OF BENJAMIN JACOB GRIMM

AT THE OPENING OF HER NEW SHOW

(OVER)

Ben's hand FLIPS the card -- and in the same caligraphy, we see --

COME AS YOU ARE

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

Off Ben's surprised -- and pleased -- expression -- we CUT TO --

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - A MEN'S "BIG AND TALL" SHOP - MORNING

Outside, everything appears ordinary -- but

INSIDE THE SHOP'S FITTING ROOM - **THE THING**

stands, with his arms raised, as several flustered TAILORS try to join together two tape measures so they can get an accurate chest measurement. The MANAGER looks doubtful --

MANAGER
You understand, Mister --

BEN
Grimm.

MANAGER
-- Mr. Grimm -- we don't have anything in your size. Your size -- uh -- doesn't exist.
(beat)
So, bearing that in mind -- when would you like this to be ready?

BEN
I'll be back at noon.

MANAGER
(condescending)
Mr. Grimm, let me explain -- we're working from scratch here. We couldn't possibly have it ready before --

Ben's stony look isn't threatening. It is, simply, non-negotiable.

BEN
Noon.

The manager forces his head forward in a nod -- as we --

CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LABORATORIES MAIN CHAMBER - JOHNNY

dressed for a date, walks by -- we can HEAR the sound of Reed working within. Noting no one can see him, Johnny can't resist --

-- smiling, he heads for a blackboard-size slate that contains a single, impenetrable equation, ten lines long and crammed with hundreds of values. Johnny picks up a marker to make some slight "improvements": a minus sign becomes a plus, another minus is dotted twice to become a division sign, and one number gets a square root sign drawn over it. Whistling, Johnny breezes back out -- as we go --

FURTHER INTO THE LAB - CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

which is behind protective goggles and is sporting a headset radio -- he's staring intently at an exposed electronic panel --

-- we PULL BACK to find that Reed's neck is stretched twenty feet across the room, into a booth that is similar in design to the "nanochamber". Most of the rest of him is standing, for balance, some feet away -- one arm stretches across this room to a console, tapping adjustments for the nanochamber into one keyboard. The monitors above it are running data from the Orion accident --

-- We FOLLOW his other arm out -- it is stretched entirely out into another room and around a corner, at least fifty feet, into another lab where a shred of metal is in a glass testing case. Here, Reed's hand is typing with the fingers stretched enough to cover the entire keyboard.

On a monitor here, we see test results start to scroll up -- "**SPECTROGRAPHIC AND CHEMICAL ANALYSIS**" --

BACK AT THE BOOTH - CLOSE ON REED

as he hears the results in a synthesized voice via the headset radio -- and we hear what he hears: the computer voice, as well as a low, indistinct background noise making it hard to hear --

COMPUTER (OVER RADIO)
Spectrographic and chemical analysis of aircraft fragment continuing. Negative for acids or corrosives.

REED (INTO RADIO)
There's interference -- please repeat --

Suddenly, a hand lashes into view to yanks the headset off Reed --

-- with his concentration broken, Reed's entire body snaps back to the center -- he whips his head around to see --

SUE

is standing there, angry and hurt, clutching the radio.

SUE
I said, I've been waiting for two hours.
(off Reed's blank look)
At the clinic.
(Reed is still lost)
To see Doctor Haden.
(he hasn't caught up yet)
The appointment I made yesterday.

Reed looks at a wall clock, realizing he's screwed up.

REED
I'm sorry, honey. It's just that I've been reconstructing data from the accident to find a way to reverse Ben's condition, and --
(points to other lab)
-- this morning, the military asked me to analyze the remnants of a fighter plane shot down over Latveria. It seems to be a weapon nobody's ever seen before --

Sue gets angrier when she realizes that Reed -- who is stealing a look at new data unfolding on the computer -- is so wrapped up in the problem that he's already forgotten about her.

SUE
Is that the kind of thing you're going to tell our kids when you brush them off?
(hands him radio)
Here. Tell it you've dealt with the "interference".

Sue turns to walk out. Reed starts after her --

REED
Sue -- please -- wait a --

-- but Reed is swatted backwards by a force field thrown back by Sue, who doesn't even break her stride. Reed tangles at the room's other end, as Sue reaches an elevator, shoving past Ben silently.

BEN
Top o' the morning to you too --

ON STREET LEVEL IN FRONT OF FOUR FREEDOMS' LOBBY - SUE

pushes out the door, past pedestrians who don't notice anything unusual -- not yet, anyway: something makes a BYSTANDER look up --

BYSTANDER'S POV - **THE SOLE OF REED'S BOOT**

is coming directly down, with forty stories of leg above it --

THE STARTLED BYSTANDER HURLS HIMSELF BACK

as Reed's foot touches down -- and the rest of Reed follows, to immediately reform in ordinary proportions. The bystanders are shocked, but Reed is just intent on catching up to Sue. He catches up to her, but she's furious, and won't stop.

REED
Come on, Sue -- I said I'm sorry --

SUE
And as soon as you did, you forgot I was in the room. Haden just caught his flight, so just stretch back up to your cocoon --

REED
This work is important --

SUE
(stops to face him)
This was important to me. I thought it meant something to you too, but you've always got some emergency to deal with. You always have, ever since I met you.
(beat)
Why did you ask me to marry you, anyway? So you could have a lab assistant and a wife all in one neat package?

REED
That's not fair --

SUE
No -- what's not fair is that there's always some new goddamnned end-of-the-world problem that you put me on hold for.
(serious)
I want to give this a shot, Reed, but I need time. If we have kids, I can't do it alone -- I've got a career too, you know? You're going to have figure out how to pencil in a little time for us --
(starts walking)
-- because you keep taking me for granted, I'm going to vanish for good.

Without stopping, Sue fades into invisibility, disappearing into a crowd that parts as an unseen force shoves through --

-- leaving behind Reed, realizing he's blown it. A moment later --

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LAB - TIGHT ON BEN'S ANGRY FACE

as he looks down at a screen -- over his shoulder, we see a dejected Reed slinking in. Reed looks up to see Ben --

REED
Ben -- ?

Suddenly, Ben whirls around, furious --

BEN
You lying son of a bitch -- you did this to me on purpose --

Ben hurls a swivel chair at Reed --

REED CURVES HIS TORSO TO DODGE THE CHAIR

as it crashes through a wall -- Reed gapes at Ben --

REED
What are you talking about?

Ben angrily points to the monitors, as he advances on Reed --

BEN
The station. The malfunction was a fake. The thruster wasn't broken. There was no reason for me to go outside. No reason for me to get trapped in the contraption you built --

With one swing, Ben destroys the chamber Reed was working on --

BEN
-- no reason for me to be a freak -- no reason, except you figured your goddamn theory was more important than my life --

Ben reaches Reed, and he's mad enough to tear him apart. Reed dodges Ben's first swing, then whips his torso around Ben like a python to barely -- just barely -- restrain him. Breathless from the thrashing, Reed twists his neck to be face to face with Ben --

REED
Victor did it -- he planted the malfunction to trick you into the nanochamber --
(winded)
-- by the time I found out, it was too late to stop the transformation.

Ben seems less than convinced -- but he does stop struggling.

BEN
And you had nothing to do with it.

Reed unwinds off Ben and assumes ordinary proportions --

REED
No.

But Ben turns and walks off, disgusted --

BEN
Sure. Sure you didn't. Just like you didn't start lyin' to me the first day I met you.

REED
Ben -- I can explain --

BEN
Yeah, you could. But I've already seen you stretch the truth further than your right arm, and it ain't the thrill it used to be.
(reaches door)
See you around, Richards. Like maybe in a million years.

Ben slams the metal door off its hinges -- leaving Reed to look at the wreckage and wonder what else can go wrong, as we CUT TO --

EXT. THE UNITED NATIONS COMPLEX - DAY - THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING

is the most familiar part of this governmental base: a forty story tower of glass and steel, located on the bank of the East River. Nothing seems unusual here -- until we PAN UP to --

THE OVERCAST SKY - A DENSE, LOW CLOUD HANGS THERE

-- and the spherical belly of an enormous airship pokes through. We can't see it all, but this segment of it suggests it's as big as a skyscraper. The bottom irises open, with the unfolding of a dozen interlocking claws -- and a smaller craft emerges --

DOOM'S SKY-SLED

flies out -- an open, private shuttle that can carry several standing passengers. Doom is literally in full regalia, flanked by a pair of his streamlined, formidable guard **Doombots**. As the ship tracks silently toward the United Nations complex -- we GO TO:

INT. "WINDOWS ON THE WORLD" RESTUARANT - DAY - JOHNNY

turns every head in the posh restaurant atop the World Trade Center as he enters with Frankie, the woman with him for his first flareup. Everybody recognizes him -- social climbers say hello, more timid diners whisper his name in a buzz that crosses the room.

As they're shown to a window booth,, Johnny casually ignites a flaming dessert before a waiter can. Frankie, who seems to be the only one unimpressed with Johnny, tries for his attention --

FRANKIE
Johnny --
(he's waving at someone)
Hello --
(he looks at her)
Listen -- I like you -- but -- do you ever turn this act of yours off?

JOHNNY
Well -- yeah, of course --

FRANKIE
Good. Because I want to see what the real Johnny Storm is like.
(smiles)
Let's try another dare. I dare you to make it through the next hour without bragging about some close call, or flaming on. Okay?

Johnny looks lost. This punches a colossal hole in his repertoire.

JOHNNY
Uh -- sure -- no problem --
(stumbling)
What would you like to talk about?

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - **CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE**

Somehow, the biggest pair of Wayfarers ever made are wedged between Ben's nose and brow -- he is walking down the street, with a slight boost in confidence evident on his face -- because --

FULL VIEW OF BEN - BEN IS DECKED OUT

in a sports jacket, slacks, and even, incredibly, dress shoes -- as he walks down the sidewalk, the gapes he's getting are a little different, but they're just as pronounced. Not far away --

INSIDE THE GALLERY - AN OPENING CROWD

of uniformly stiff buyers, critics and afficionados is milling around through the space, which has been decorated for the occasion. As they move through the statues, sampling wine and hors d'oerves, none has any idea what's approaching --

-- until one arty type spills his wine: he can see, though the front plate glass window, the Thing crossing the street.

OUTSIDE IN THE STREET - BEN CROSSES THE STREET

-- holding his hand up to STOP traffic as he does. But as he gets closer to the gallery --

BEN'S MOVING POV TOWARD WINDOW

-- as Ben gets closer, more and more of the art crowd inside sees him. They may have money, they may have educations, but they sure don't have class: the stares, pointing, and laughs directed at Ben are as cruel as any you'd find in the lowest rural freak show.

-- Further back in the gallery, Ben's POV moves in to find that --

-- Alicia is talking and laughing with two handsome, well dressed MEN -- one of whom has an arm around her in a very familiar way.

CLOSE ON BEN

who's had the wind knocked out of him. Again. Whatever romantic hopes he thought was possible here, whatever he was dreaming about, he's just realized is idiotic.

Ben sees his own reflection in the glass -- as well as the pointing crowd behind it -- and suddenly, the clothes that seemed so cool in the store feel like a clown outfit. Disgusted with himself, Ben turns and keeps walking away down the street -- as --

INSIDE THE GALLERY - ALICIA

is still talking and laughing with the two men, but she hears --

PARTIER #1 (O.S.)
(snide)
-- Well, there goes the Gotham golem --

PARTIER #2 (O.S.)
(acid laugh)
Was he dressed for a date, or for the circus?

Hearing this, Alicia pales -- and starts shoving her way toward the door -- and we CUT TO:

INT. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING - THE SECRETARY GENERAL

is continuing his harrangue against Doom --

SECRETARY GENERAL
In condemning Latveria's astonishing human rights abuses, we most of all condemn its leader -- Doctor Doom.
(beat)
I will not dignify this tyrant with the royal title he desires.

IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING LOBBY - **DOOM**

strides through with a regal air -- he takes no notice of the metal detector's SHRIEK as he sets it off, as one of the Doombots following him smashes it in half.

A pair of SECURITY GUARDS pick their jaws up off the floor and rush toward Doom -- but he doesn't even give them a glance --

-- the Doombots swat the guards aside forcefully and fatally -- one crumples to the floor, another is hurled up into the Foucault Pendulum dangling from the ceiling. Doom throws open the doors --

INSIDE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY - **DOOM**

hasn't yet been seen back at the door -- he's just in time for the angry Secretary General to pick up steam --

SECRETARY GENERAL
-- as a figure of evil on the world stage, Doom is surpassed only by Hitler --

DOOM
Your comparison is a mistaken one.

The icy, metallic voice commands everyone's attention -- the Secretary General pauses, and every single national representative turns to look back at the doorway Doom has emerged from --

-- as they do, Doom raises his right arm -- **an oddly shaped gun is in his hand** -- **and a beam fires from it** --

THE SECRETARY GENERAL IS HIT BY THE BEAM

and he is caught in the same glow we saw in the nanochamber -- the difference is, instead of molecules being joined together, his are being torn apart -- and he can feel each one of them scatter --

After his features distort in one second of wild, disembodied agony, there is nothing left of him but the CRACK of air rushing in to fill the vacuum left behind.

The general assembly reacts with horrified, stunned silence -- the only sound is Doom's arctic voice slicing through the chamber --

DOOM
Doom is surpassed by **no one.**

Doom strides up the aisle, toward the podium, with a royal bearing -- and the general assembly is now officially, totally, panicking -- those nearest Doom shrink away from him, others try to get out the exits -- but they are all locked --

OUT IN THE LOBBY - THE DOOMBOTS

have control over the security console's computers.

INT. U.N. SECRETARIAT TOWER - **SECURITY LEVEL** - THE SECURITY AGENTS

have never seen, or anticipated, anything like this -- the LEAD AGENT is barking orders to a dozen others --

LEAD AGENT
-- Start full evacuation of the tower, now --

IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING - **DOOM** IS AT THE PODIUM

directly underneath the enormous U.N. olive branch seal --

DOOM
It is as ironic as it is convenient that you have called this session to condemn me. It has spared me the necessity of gathering you together so that I may condemn you.
(beat)
I hereby proclaim war against all your petty, failed regimes, in the name of liberating the people of the world to live under one sovereign -- one rule -- one intellect --
(beat)
-- under **Doom.**

OUTSIDE THE SECRETARIAT TOWER - **DOOM'S SKY-SLED**

flies around the upper stories, pilotless, and it **fires several small missiles at the building --**

IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY - DOOM

calmly lays out his vision as if a Doomacracy is the most sensible, logical form of government imaginable --

DOOM
You have an alternative. Instead of the empty gesture of condemnation, you may vote to join me in my new age for humanity.
(beat)
The world's people will want for nothing as the royal subjects of Doom. There will be no border squabbles. No hunger. No hatred. Your frail, misshapen bodies will be rebuilt to my specifications for life eternal.
(evenly)
Under my care, you will be granted a millenium of absolute, unassailable peace, tranquility, and happiness.

Somehow, Doom's mechanical voice and icy manner undercuts the "happiness" of his proposed reign -- we GO TO --

THE ROOF OF THE SECRETARIAT TOWER - THE FEMALE SECURITY AGENT

is bent over the broken, smoking husk of the tiny missile -- it looks as threatening as a bottle rocket. She takes out a radio --

AGENT
Threat is negative -- a small missile has impacted, but it looks like a dud -- repeat, threat is negative --

-- but as we look over her shoulder, we see the nanotech payload of the missile is unevenly and rapidly **dissolving the ceiling** --

-- the cracks cobweb across the roof, and a chasm forms under the agent's feet -- she roughly falls to the next floor -- even as --

THE U.N. SECRETARIAT BUILDING

shows signs of having been hit by three nano-missiles on its side -- the molecular rot is spreading **fast** -- and we CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK ALLEYWAY - DAY - BEN

is moving through the alley, tearing off the last of his suit, and in no mood to run into any people -- but behind him, there's the SOUND of heels clicking up the pavement -- Ben turns --

-- and some distance back, at the alley entrance, is Alicia.

ALICIA
Ben?

BEN
(a little thrown)
How'd you find me?

Alicia moves closer to Ben, though they're some distance apart.

ALICIA
You know that trick Sherlock Holmes does? Where he can tell exactly who someone is, a block away, just from the sound of their footsteps?
(beat)
Well, with you it isn't much of a trick.
(beat)
Why didn't you come in?

BEN
(tries to laugh it off)
Ahh -- I couldn't find an outfit that goes with orange.

ALICIA
Bleah. Good thing. I'd rather stay blind than see one that did.

Ben couldn't be more embarassed by the whole thing. If it were physically possible, he'd blush. Alicia keeps moving closer --

BEN
Look -- I know you were just bein' polite. I guess I read more into your invite than you --
(awkward)
Shouldn't you be headin' back to your party? Your boyfriend's gonna be out lookin' for you.

ALICIA
My boyfriend? Gerard? He's my dealer.
(beat)
His boyfriend writes for the Arts and Leisure section. It comes in handy sometimes.

ALICIA
(almost up to Ben)
Why don't you come back with me?

BEN
Nah -- it ain't really my crowd.

ALICIA
You think it's mine? Carving out a three hundred pound block of stone -- that's a breeze. Keeping a straight face while listening to those phonies is the real work.
(now face to face)
If you won't come back -- would it be okay if I really got a look at your face? My way?

Ben stiffens even more --

BEN
Well -- yeah, sure --

Alicia takes Ben's face in both hands, and methodically, lightly traces it with her fingers, to visualize what he looks like -- and for Ben, it's an incredibly sensuous experience.

BEN
-- just for -- maybe, a couple days or so --

CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LABS - DAY - A COMPUTER SCREEN

where the plane fragment was being tested reads: **FRAGMENT ANALYSIS: AIRCRAFT DISASSEMBLED ON MOLECULAR LEVEL --**

We MOVE PAST this into the lab, as we hear Victor's final recorded words from the space station crackling from a speaker --

VICTOR (OVER SPEAKER)
-- pray to **me** for a final annihilation that I will not grant -- I shall be your **doom** --

-- ultimately we find Reed, concentrating on another screen: the top line reads "**TERMINAL ORBITAL TRACK OF ORION STATION**", and in animation, it shows the path the station took as it crashed. The screen's map digitally moves in to the coordinates of --

-- the mountains of Latveria.

REED

considers this thoughtfully: it seems impossible that Victor could still be alive, and yet --

Reed stretches to shut off the recording of static -- with this new silence, he hears a sound from another room. Something makes Reed check it out -- he stretches down the hallway, and into

THE FOUR FREEDOMS "WORLDWATCH" ROOM

which has panels of electronic equipment monitoring radio and television frequencies. One television shows Doom's speech on CNN with a "BREAKING NEWS" logo. Reed stretches to turn up the volume, and snaps the rest of his body into the room, watching as --

DOOM (ON TELEVISION)
I will grant you twenty-four hours to fully comprehend the perfection of my offered utopia. If I do not hear from your representatives in that time -- the world shall hear from me. In the meantime, my first official act as your monarch is to disband this obsolete cabal --
(calmly)
-- and, as you will no longer have any purpose for this headquarters, in several minutes, it will be destroyed.
(simply, with a regal wave)
I bid you good day.

Doom walks off the stage -- and the TELEVISION CAMERA pans to find the delegates panicking and streaming out of the now open exits --

-- and Reed realizes what's happened -- the nanotech weaponry, the crash in Latveria, the voice -- it all adds up to --

REED
-- Victor.

Reed doesn't pause for a second -- he shoots his body out of the room and into the hall -- he can stretch faster than he can run --

IN THE FOUR FREEDOMS HANGAR - REED

stretches in -- and one arm shoots thirty feet across the room to unerringly flip a dozen toggles to prep the Fantasticar -- as --

-- Reed's other arm snatches a flare gun off the wall --

OUTER VIEW OF FOUR FREEDOMS BUILDING - **REED'S ARM**

extends fifty feet out a window and fires the rocket flare -- it arcs over toward the United Nations, exploding over it --

THE "4" FLARE IGNITES

skywriting the numeral "4" in a circle of fire -- as --

OUTER VIEW OF FOUR FREEDOMS' ROOF - THE TOP

of the slanted segment of the "4" shape slides back with a metallic CLANG -- the slant of the "4" is a maglev launching pad --

-- **Reed shoots out in the Fantasticar, its engines blazing** -- as --

EXT. ON BROADWAY - DAY - **SUE**

is visible and walking down the street, still angry about her fight with Reed. But as the crowd points up, she looks up too --

SUE'S POV - **THE "4" FLARE**

is in the distance -- and as her view moves back, she can see the Fantasticar is forty stories up and headed for where she is --

SUE

doesn't hesitate for a moment -- concentrating, she **forms a force field "pillar" directly underneath herself** -- it takes her up like an elevator that is just barely visible around the edges --

-- as she rockets up on the pillar, she's able to curve the track so that it intersects with the Fantasticar -- she seamlessly drops into the side cockpit as it glides by. Meanwhile --

INT. NEW YORK ALLEYWAY - BEN AND ALICIA

Alicia still is tracing her fingers along Ben's face -- but she's lingering longer than she has to. Something's happening here between both of them. Ben is staring at her, frozen --

BEN
(halting)
It was -- nice, yesterday. For a little while, you treated me like I was -- normal.

ALICIA
That's funny. I was going to say the same thing to you.

But above, a light catches Ben's attention -- he looks up --

-- **the "4" flare** is circling in the sky above.

CLOSE ON BEN

-- as his jaw **clenches** with a stone mill GRIND --

BEN
(hisses)
-- son of a bitch --

ALICIA
(moves back, shocked)
What is it? What's wrong?

BEN
Just my luck, holdin' up true to form.
(moves away down alley)
I'm bein' paged, kid. I gotta go.

Ben runs down the alley to get out -- but he forces himself to stop. He's more afraid of this than any coming battle, but he's got to do it. Ben turns back --

BEN
Listen -- uh -- I just got out of a bad relationship, but -- uh --
(spits it out)
-- do you wanna have dinner later?

ALICIA
(without hesitation)
Sure. I thought I was going to have to ask you.

Ben's smile is blinding. It may not be normal life, but it'll do.

BEN
Great! I'll call you --

With that, Ben runs out of the alley and

INTO THE STREET - THE THING

raises two stony fingers to his lips to unleash a granite whistle that's as grating as you'd guess --

-- in the street, a taxi speeds by with no intent of stopping -- we'll recognize this as the same cab that splattered Ben earlier.

-- Ben recognizes it too -- and steps out into traffic -- where he grabs the rear of the taxi, crumpling its fender and instantly braking it from 40 mph to zero -- Ben tears the door open, and climbs in, visibly tilting the suspension to one side --

IN THE CAB - BEN

squints at the terrified DRIVER -- and through clenched teeth --

BEN
You are on duty -- ain't ya?

Off the driver's terrifed nod, Ben points up --

BEN
Follow that flare!

INT. "WINDOWS ON THE WORLD" - DAY - JOHNNY

is squirming a little impatiently, since the conversation isn't about him any more -- until he sees, out an opposite window --

THE "4 FLARE

is directly over the U.N. complex --

IN THE RESTAURANT - JOHNNY STANDS UP

in the middle of Frankie's story --

JOHNNY
Sorry, Frankie. Looks like I've lost this dare --
(to other end of restaurant)
Clear that window!

AT AN OPPOSITE WINDOW BOOTH - TWO YUPPIE DINERS

glance at Johnny, sneer, and go back to their Caesar salads --

IN THE AISLE - **JOHNNY FLAMES ON**

igniting his outer clothes -- with a leap, **Johnny flies a blazing path directly toward the window**, leaving cinders that used to be his clothes drifting in his wake --

AT THE BOOTH - THE TWO YUPPIES

now can't get out of the booth fast enough --

FRONT VIEW OF JOHNNY **FLYING THROUGH RESTAURANT**

-- other diners and waiters throw themselves out of his path -- with his hands stretched out in front of him, he **fires a blast of plasma flame at the window ahead** -- not only does the flame incinerate a "**NON-SMOKING SECTION**" sign above the window --

-- it also **liquifies an exit hole in the glass** just in time for Johnny to streak through it. As --

AT THE U.N. COMPLEX - THE FANTASTICAR LANDS ON A LOW ROOF

Reed and Sue get out, amazed -- because --

THE **U.N. SECRETARIAT BUILDING IS DISSOLVING**

Each nano-weapon attacks a different component: one attacks glass, one steel, one concrete -- molecular ripples shudder across the building, making the demolition appear to be a living thing --

-- as the building is **erased**, sections of steel and glass are carved off the bulding and **shear off** --

-- on the ground, people who've managed to get out run for their lives past the flags on First Avenue, away from falling debris --

REED STILTS HIS WAY THROUGH THE CROWD

which is runnning from the collapsing building -- he looks up --

REED'S POV - TWENTY STORIES UP - **PANICKED WORKERS**

are hanging out of the dissolving windows, frantically waving -- there are at least three dozen of them --

REED RUNS TOWARD THE BUILDING

with twenty-foot strides -- when he reaches it, he stretches up --

INSIDE THE BUILDING - THE WORKERS

are stuck at the windows, with no way out -- the floor dissolves as debris from upper floors tumbles through the cavity -- they only have a two-foot ledge that's **shrinking** -- but --

WORKERS POV - **REED IS STRETCHING UP TOWARD THE BUILDING**

-- and his body **widens out** as far across as the building --

LONG SHOT ON BUILDING - **REED HAS FORMED AN ESCAPE SLIDE**

that's twenty stories high and four hundred feet across --

ON THE BANK OF WINDOWS - THE WORKERS

are dumbfounded -- nobody expected this kind of rescue. Reed literally hugs the building, and the effort clearly is crowding his limits -- he cranes his neck up to face a worker --

REED
(straining from the effort)
-- can't -- maintain this long -- jump --

The worker doesn't need to be told twice -- he leaps into the slide, and is soon followed by the rest -- as --

ON THE "DAG HAMMARSKJOLD LIBRARY" ROOF - **CLOSE ON DOOM**

on his Sky-Sled, about to leave. But he sees Reed, and his regal composure drops -- behind the mask, his eyes narrow in hatred --

DOOM
Richards --

ON THE GROUND - REED

has assumed his ordinary proportions, as the now-freed office workers help each other to get away from the building -- Reed doesn't notice Doom is above him on the roof, **aiming down his laser weapon** -- but as he **fires at Reed**--

-- the beam is intercepted by Sue's force field -- it curves over Reed, forming a prism that breaks the beam up harmlessly --

-- Doom turns, furious, to see Sue on the ground by the "Swords Into Plowshares" statue. Doom **aims and fires down at her** -- but --

SUE FADES INTO INVISIBILITY JUST AS THE BEAM HITS

-- and since it's a light weapon, it's rendered useless -- the beam passes through Sue, destroying the statue behind her --

ON THE DAG HAMMARSKJOLD ROOF - DOOM

turns to the Doombots flanking him on the Sky-Sled --

DOOM
Incinerate them both!

The Doombots fly off the roof with boot-mounted jets --

VIEW OVER U.N. COURTYARD - TRACKING WITH DOOMBOTS

as they fly over the hundred flags below -- we can't see Sue, but with arm-mounted flame throwers, they shoot blasts of flame down --

ON THE GROUND - THE FLAMES RAIN DOWN

with random but devastating force -- soon, Sue's invisible body is partially covered with soot -- she is visible, and vulnerable --

-- above her, the Doombots see her and converge on her position -- they are about to fire -- but as they do --

THE HUMAN TORCH

intercedes, **flying directly in the path of the flame as it's unleashed** -- Johnny **absorbs the flame entirely** and arcs above the Doombots, invigorated as if he'd dived into a swimming pool.

Before the Doombots can regroup, Johnny **turns their re-amplified flame back on them** -- and both of the robots **explode**, crashing into flaming heaps in the U.N. courtyard -- meanwhile --

EXT. MIDTOWN NEW YORK INTERSECTION - DAY - GRIDLOCK

has occurred -- a dozen cars are frozen in the intersection --

INSIDE BEN'S CAB - BEN

is pissed off -- he's drumming his fingers loudly on the seat, as the cab's stuck at the light. The driver looks back, nervous --

DRIVER
Well, what am I supposed to do?

Angry, Ben gets out of the cab -- and --

IN THE INTERSECTION - **BEN PICKS UP THE CARS BLOCKING THE CAB**

and moves them onto the sidewalk, stacking them three-high -- he impatiently gets back in the cab, which speeds through -- as --

THE UNITED NATIONS TOWER

is rapidly **falling apart** -- the molecular scattering now makes it look more like an animated Dali painting than a skyscraper.

The fact that it's still standing is a miracle -- pieces shear off to tumble into the center and into the courtyard, and converging, spiralling cavities threaten to cut the building in **half** -- as --

NEAR THE TOP OF THE BUILDING - **THE TERRIFIED SECURITY AGENT**

who had checked the roof is **trapped, dangling from a section that is melting** -- its support gives way, and with no choice, she **leaps twenty feet down to an exposed steel girder** --

-- she hits the girder and hangs on, but her weight tilts it down, and the steel holding it on is **dissolving** --

AGENT
(screaming down over din)
-- God -- **help me** -- **somebody** --

CLOSE ON THE HUMAN TORCH

-- he's flying about twenty feet up -- but he sees someone in the crowd pointing up, and he looks up to see the stranded woman --

-- **the Torch streaks over** to what's left of the building, and **arcs up the side toward the woman** -- but as he flies up it --

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING - THE CORNER SUPPORT IS EATEN AWAY

at the center point. The building **is buckling and caving in** -- the top half **leans and starts to fall toward the East River** --

JOHNNY IS FLYING UP

-- he's halfway there, but in precisely the same second --

THE AGENT FALLS

off the girder, shrieking as she plummets down the side -- and **the top half of the building topples over** from the weak point of the middle -- and it's **falling on top of the agent and the Torch** --

THE TORCH BULLETS UPWARD TO GRAB THE AGENT

with an unflamed hand, two-thirds up the building --

-- with the agent dangling from one arm, Johnny arcs to the side, but it's too late -- **the building falls on top of them** --

-- Johnny has two bad options: get crushed by half a skyscraper, or **fly into one of its holes** -- he chooses the latter -- and

INSIDE THE SKYSCRAPER - FOLLOWING JOHNNY

as he swerves through irregularly spaced holes in the floors, dodging falling debris -- since the building is falling, the debris falls from the side and from above, and the holes he spots shift ahead of him before he can get there --

-- Enough of the building has been erased to show that the East River is coming up awfully fast -- but every time Johnny gets tantalizingly near an escape hole in a wall, he has to dodge away from it and through a floor hole to avoid falling wreckage --

-- Johnny flies ahead "up" to the roof, which is now tilting down sideways to the water -- it's now or never: Johnny finds a hole in the bottom corner of the roof and pours it on, racing towards it --

THE TOP OF THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING HITS THE EAST RIVER

with a colossal, explosive **wave of water** that barely misses Johnny and the agent, extinguishing the plasma flame trail behind him as he loops up and around --

-- Johnny and the agent are safe, but the area between the building and the East River's bank is pulverized -- as above --

THE REST OF THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING COLLAPSES

like a house of cards, most of it either following the path of the top half or collapsing inward --

-- but a huge section of the building shears off toward First Avenue, and toward at least a hundred citizens -- amongst them is

SUE - LOOKING UP AT THE FALLING BLOCK

-- it's a hash of concrete and steel girders that's twenty feet square -- it has to weigh at least five tons --

-- there's no way she can stop it, but she has to at least try: instead of running, or encasing herself in a smaller, denser field, Sue **throws a force field umbrella** over the targeted area --

CLOSE ON SUE LOOKING UP

-- she knows there's not a chance this will work -- in fact, she hasn't even made the field wide enough -- but as the tangle of steel and concrete is almost upon them, point-first --

LONG SHOT - **THE THING IS THERE**

-- **Ben catches the debris by its leading point, braking it** and finally supporting it, even though he's dwarfed by it --

-- some of the loose concrete shakes out of the steel, falling as boulders that safely bounce off of Sue's "umbrella" -- while --

IN THE U.N. FLAG CONCOURSE - **REED**

is being pursued by two newly arrived Doombots -- they're flying over Reed, firing down bomb-bursts as Reed serpentines through a maze of flagpoles. Sooner or later he's going to run out of luck --

IN THE STREET - **BEN**

is still holding onto the debris -- he gets Sue's attention --

BEN
Gimme some room!

Sue moves away from Ben, and drops the "umbrella" force field --

-- Ben takes the tangle of steel girders, and spins it around -- once -- twice -- finally releasing it on the third spin --

THE FIVE TON FRAMEWORK

goes **flying** up First Avenue just over the flagpoles -- the trajectory takes it into the flagpoles, which snap like pencils --

-- below it, Reed flattens as the poles go flying everywhere --

-- and the two Doombots try to evade the junk missile, but both are entangled in it as it SMASHES into them -- after a twenty yard flight, the whole thing IMPACTS into the concrete --

CLOSE ON DOOMBOTS

-- they struggle to get up, but they're enmeshed in the girders -- and some of the residual nano-disassemblers go to work on them, rendering them inoperative in a shower of SPARKS.

IN THE STREET - REED

has reformed his body to normal proportions and joined Ben and Sue, a little breathless from the chase --

REED
(panting)
Nice shot, Ben.

BEN
(stony)
What makes you think I was trying to hit them?

Ben is clearly only half-kidding -- and Reed knows it. But from behind -- Doom's voice booms out --

DOOM (O.S.)
The first of my creations. The first to enjoy my benevolence.

DOOM IS STANDING IN THE WRECKAGE

where the tower once was -- the deconstruction is complete. There is nothing left of the tower but half-melted walls and sculptures.

DOOM
Have you come to pay homage to your maker?
(beat)
Or did Dr. Richards' jealousy of my genius prevent him from telling you my role in creating your current form?

IN THE STREET - BEN

is floored at first -- but he looks to Reed, and Reed's face confirms it. Ben's stunned look changes to total rage -- rage that can now be given a focus. Ben starts over to Doom --

REED
Ben, don't -- it's got to be a trick --

Ben hurls Reed to the side without missing a step -- Reed painfully collides with a pile of wreckage. Johnny, who has landed and flamed off, helps Reed up, as Ben advances on Doom, his powerful STOMPING shaking loose what rubble is left.

BEN
A trick?
(advances further)
The trick is gonna be finding enough pieces of this son of a bitch to bury --

As Ben marches on Doom, Doom stands perfectly still, his arms crossed in amusement, even up to the point that Ben reaches him --

BEN
Keep smiling, Tin Man --
(raises fist)
-- **it's clobberin' time** --

Ben swings his fist down for a devastating, piledriver blow -- but before he can connect --

-- **Doom's hand grabs Ben's fist**, halting it in a surprisingly powerful grip -- the metal hand locks down on Ben's --

DOOM
(hissing)
-- very -- well -- put --

-- Ben looks down, straining -- the impact has caused Doom's shoulder to separate -- revealing **purely mechanical parts** within -- it isn't Doom, it's a **replica robot** --

-- as Ben struggles in it's grip, the head starts **laughing** -- and a **mechanical humming** from the torso of the robot begins to build --

THE TORSO OF THE ROBOT DETONATES

in a blinding, powerful **explosion** -- not a gaseous one, more like a small version of an atomic blast that throws debris **everywhere** --

-- torn out of the searing light is **Ben**, who is **hurtling up and away like a rocket** --

ANGLE ON BEN ROCKETING UPWARD

-- Ben, tumbling end over end, is being thrown out of sight --

-- but **Reed's torso and arm stretch up** -- Reed grabs one of Ben's arms to slow him down -- and at the same time, **Johnny flies up** and grabs Ben on the other side, cutting his momentum -- and the two of them are able to lower Ben roughly back to earth.

IN THE RUBBLE - THE FANTASTIC FOUR

are essentially beaten -- Reed, Johnny and Sue turn Ben over. He's breathing -- but just barely. As they lick their wounds --

OUT AT SEA - **DOOM'S AIRSHIP RETREATS**

-- and for the first time, we see the enormity of it. It looks more like a craft from another planet: it is three hundred feet high and at least a thousand feet across, shaped like an inverted pyramid, and has a silent, vibration-free propulsion system.

As it flies away, it fires a small missile down at the Statue of Liberty -- it hits with an anticlimactic, quiet PUFF -- and we --

CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - DAY - **THE DOOM REPLICA'S HEAD**

is scorched and battered by the blast, but is mostly intact. Reed has partly disassembled it in a chamber made of eight inch sheets of armored glass. Elongated metal tools probe the top of it --

-- and behind the case, Reed works the dissection tools, solemnly looking over monitors displaying high-resolution fiber-optic views of the head's inner workings, as Johnny, Ben and Sue look on.

REED
This is generations ahead of current android technology -- it's run by a biocomputer that perfectly mimics Victor's brain functions.

SUE
What happened to him?

REED
I've analyzed the last data transmissions sent by the station before it crashed -- and apparently, the nanochamber melded Victor's cellular structure into a molecular hybrid of his body and the machinery inside the nanochamber. The data is incomplete, but --
(staggered)
-- his armor is a nanotech construct -- and his body has to be totally malformed behind it. His mind has transformed into something like an advanced version of the supercomputer he built -- but Victor himself is imprisoned inside it. His desires, ambitions, and obsessions have all been amplified a thousandfold, along with his intellect.
(looks up)
Before, Victor was driven to bring his own vision of order to the world. Now he's got the capacity to do it.

SUE
The battle going on in his mind, between his emotions and his intellect, must be torture --

BEN
(unsympathetic)
Good thing he was such a level-headed, well-adjusted guy before.

Reed scans through a tap into the head's "brain" -- it flashes hundreds of diagrams of bizarre weapons and devices on a screen, at subliminal speed, dizzying Reed with the sinister implications.

REED
What he did today at the United Nations -- it's just the beginning. With these devices, he could destroy continents -- or if he chose, even the entire world --
(turns to others)
-- and we're the only ones who have any chance at all of stopping him.

Johnny can't believe his ears -- he jumps up, incredulous --

JOHNNY
We're going to stop him? Did you stretch your brain out of shape or something? I mean, I don't mind frying the odd bank robber, but this is a little out of our league.
(beat)
I knew two of those guys who got shot down in Latveria. They were the best combat pilots I ever saw, and Doom swatted them like flies --

REED
We can't just walk away from this -- some of his weaponry seems to be based on my designs. I'm partly responsible for this threat --

JOHNNY
(hot)
You're one hundred percent responsible, pal -- if you'd stopped this psycho back when it counted, in the station, none of us would be in this spot now.
(beat)
But that doesn't change the fact that we don't stand a chance against this -- this --
(points toward head)
-- whatever-the-hell-it-is --

REED
(heating up, but firm)
I'm afraid too, Johnny -- you'd have to be crazy not to be -- but --

JOHNNY
"Afraid"? Me? Listen, Doc, I was a combat pilot for four years --

Ben can't stifle a sudden, sharp GUFFAW --

BEN
Come on, junior -- you were posted in the Blue Angels, and you got kicked outta that outfit for bein' a showoff.
(beat)
You never fought anything tougher than a tequila hangover in your whole life, and you know it.

JOHNNY
Whatever. The point is, this is not our job --

At that, suddenly, Johnny is cut off --

DOOM REPLICA (O.S., FILTERED)
I find your overwhelming fear amusing --

IN THE CASE - THE DOOM REPLICA'S HEAD

-- the eyes have come to life, along with a disembodied mechanical voice that is more clinical -- even calm -- than Doom's.

DOOM REPLICA
-- and your cowardice is wise. Your hope of vanquishing me is infinitesmal.
(eyes shift to Reed)
Despite all your attempts to block my work -- despite your attempts to kill me -- I have evolved beyond you. I am the first to evolve beyond humanity. And nothing that you do will stop me from granting mankind the greatest gift imaginable --
(beat)
-- reconfiguring their flawed, obsolete bodies and minds into forms equal to my own.

Reed's eyes cut over to the monitor wired to the brain --

ON THE MONITOR - **HORRIFIC SKETCHES OF NEW "HUMAN" DESIGNS**

flip by at subliminal speed, so quickly that we can't study them in detail, but we see enough of the new features to be horrified -- one design is faceless, one is amphibian, one is two feet tall with insectine limbs, and they just keep coming --

THE DOOM REPLICA HEAD

is describing the brave new world with serene, unnerving calm --

DOOM REPLICA
Nothing you can do will prevent my bringing this paradise to the world's citizens. Nothing you can do will prevent my enacting a measure of revenge for your attempts to block the advancement of the human race --

As the Doom head says this, Johnny looks over to --

THE BRAIN MONITOR - **TORTURE DEVICE DESIGNS**

flash by -- they are half medieval, half futuristic, and custom designed for each of the Fantastic Four. The photorealistic schematics are complete with photo animations of them -- as one nightmarish device tears an animation of Sue to shreds --

JOHNNY

can't take it: one hand **flames on**, and he blasts a jet of fire at the case, melting through the armored glass as if it were ice --

-- and the robot head is bathed in flame, still talking even as it melts into a puddle of molten slag.

All are silent for a moment -- but it's clear that no one has changed their position. Reed looks to Johnny, determined --

REED
(tough, not pleading)
I don't know if we can stop him. I don't know if anybody, or anything, can stop him. But we've got to try.

Johnny shakes his head, still angry at the whole idiotic idea --

JOHNNY
It's suicide. You want to kill yourself, have a ball, but this time you're not taking me or my sister down with you --

With that, Johnny forcibly grabs Sue by the arm and stalks out of the room, leaving Ben and Reed behind -- and Ben looks slightly disappointed to see that his assessment was dead on:

BEN
Just like I thought back in flight school.
(no joy in being right)
Any real trouble, and that kid'll melt like a goddamn snowman.

INTO A CORRIDOR - JOHNNY DRAGS SUE

along, but she's not going willingly --

SUE
-- Let me go --

JOHNNY
No way. You took care of me when we were kids, and I'm returning the favor now whether you like it or not. That's the last time that son of a bitch is putting you in danger --

Sue abruptly pulls away from Johnny, angry herself now --

SUE
You're right. It might be the last time. We might all get killed. But I've made my own decisions since mom and dad died, and I'm making this one too --
(firm)
-- I'm going.

Johnny and Sue both angrily stare at each other, at an impasse. Finally, Johnny breaks this, and turns to walk away --

SUE
I'm going to prep the plane. I know you've got better things to do, like beeping your agent to see if your movie deal closed --

JOHNNY
(yells back)
Listen, do me a favor -- when Doom finally does kill you, try to make sure you're visible -- it'll make it easier for me to reclaim the body.

Without any acknowledgement, Sue turns down the corridor toward the hangar -- and Johnny angrily stalks away, flinging a fireball that harmlessly breaks up against a corner as he does. Meanwhile --

IN THE LAB - REED AND BEN

are left alone, with a lot of residual tension between them.

BEN
Don't worry. I'm goin'. I got my own reasons to nail this guy.

Reed uncomfortably tries to finish their last conversation --

REED
Ben -- listen, about the station --

BEN
I ain't interested in hearin' it, Richards. As far as I can see, there ain't five cents worth o' difference between you and Doom.

Ben starts walking out -- and Reed is thrown, and mad --

REED
What's that supposed to mean?

BEN
(stops, turns back coldly)
Can't figure that one out? I'll help. You said you tried to stop Doom on the station.
(beat)
Exactly how hard did you try?
(off Reed's look)
Did you really do everything you could? Or was a little teeny part of you just dyin' to see what was gonna happen to me while I was stuck in your molecule scrambler?

Reed flushes with anger at the suggestion -- but he can't honestly tell Ben that he's wrong. He can't think of anything to say at all.

BEN
(sardonic)
Well, stop the presses. There is a question Reed Richards can't answer.
(walks out)
Good thing you're flexible enough to watch your own back, Richards. 'Cause I won't be.

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

as he thinks about what Ben's said -- and we CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LAUNCH AREA - **THE FANTASTICAR**

is readying for launch -- Ben is in the lead cockpit, and Sue and Reed are also aboard, in separate cockpits -- but very notably, Johnny's cockpit is empty. Ben is finishing the pre-flight -- and we hear the WHINE of the engines warming up --

BEN
-- rolling back hangar roof --

At that, the hangar roof above starts CRANKING BACK -- but as it does, and the sunlight above rolls in, Sue looks off to the side --

AT THE OTHER END OF THE LAUNCH AREA - **JOHNNY**

is crossing toward the Fantasticar. From the look on his face, we see his resolve -- he can't walk away from them, no matter what.

Inside the Fantasticar, Reed and Sue are both glad to see Johnny -- but as the canopy is popped open and Johnny gets in --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

Ben actually is the happiest -- and proudest -- of all to see that Johnny made it. Not a chance he'll let that show, though --

BEN (OVER INTERCOM)
(sharp)
Glad you decided to join us, kid --
(as Johnny climbs in)
This rig flies kinda lopsided when there ain't two hundred pounds on that side.

As Johnny SLAMS the canopy shut -- we CUT TO:

EXT. THE MANHATTAN SKYLINE - THE FANTASTICAR FLIES OUT

over the water, passing what once was the Statue of Liberty -- but now, a nano-missile has **reconstructed it into a statue of Doom** with an upraised fist. As the plane zips by, we --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OUTER LATVERIA - DAY - OVER MOUNTAIN RANGE - **THE FANTASTICAR**

streaks over a group of towering, impressive mountains, and under an overcast sky -- at the far end of the range sits Castle Doom.

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - BEN IS PILOTING

with his attention on the "heads up" windshield display -- we can see the instruments have been modified for Ben's enormous hands.

BEN
That's it -- but I don't know about going in from this side. We're just a little bit conspicuous up here.

REED (ON INTERCOM)
It should be all right, Ben. The data I was able to pull from the android brain indicated this was the most lightly guarded route.

As Reed says this --

GROUND VIEW OF FANTASTICAR STREAKING HIGH ABOVE

-- In a rock outcropping, a rack of five missiles swivel horizontally to track with the plane --

-- and **all of them fire up toward the Fantasticar** --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - BEN GAPES DOWN

at the missiles tracking up from ahead, behind, and to the side, as the "heads up" display underlines the obvious by blinking red **WARNING** lights from each direction --

REED (OVER INTERCOM)
However -- it's possible that false data was planted in the android as a ploy --

BEN
(incredulous)
Y'think?

Ben pulls back on the stick for a steep ascent --

ON THE FANTASTICAR CLIMBING FAST - **THE MISSILES**

have split into divergent paths -- but the first two come up fast, matching Ben's evasive moves --

REED (ON INTERCOM)
-- firing anti-missile countermeasures --

-- as Reed says this, a pair of anti-missile missiles launch from the Fantasticar and rocket down toward the two nearest missiles --

-- but they miss by a very wide margin and impact on the ground --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - BEN

is swerving the stick all over the place, frantically --

BEN
Here's a tip, stretch -- quit buyin' your air-to-air defenses at Jersey yard sales.

The missiles are drawing closer -- and Reed looks baffled --

REED
I don't understand -- I just reconfigured the equations for the targeting software myself --

All the color drains out of Johnny's face for a second -- that's the equation he screwed up, but he's not going to admit it --

JOHNNY
-- Oh, way to go, Reed --
(SLAMS open custom port)
-- Five o'clock, Ben --

Johnny sticks his arm out of a "gun" port customized for this purpose, as the Fantasticar dips down --

OUTSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - **JOHNNY'S ARM**

sticks out of the cabin, and at close range, **a blast of plasma flame incinerates** the rockets of one missile -- it veers off course to collide with a second, and both harmlessly explode --

-- just as another pair of missiles is approaching from behind --

INSIDE SUE'S COCKPIT - SUE

sees them, and focuses --

OUTSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - **SUE'S FORCE FIELD**

forms a dual looping chute around the plane that causes the missiles to harmlessly spiral away, one going clockwise, the other going counter-clockwise -- but --

-- the last missile approaches on the side opposite Johnny -- but this one is really close --

JOHNNY (ON INTERCOM)
-- one more, Ben -- nine o'clock --

BEN (ON INTERCOM)
(fast)
-- I see it, I see it --

As Ben says this, he **spins the Fantasticar upside-down** so that Johnny is in position to blast it head on -- Johnny **fires a blast of plasma flame too late, just as the missile explodes --**

-- but the blast isn't a conventional explosion -- the detonation throws out a group of dozens of smaller machines -- they're all different sizes, ranging from a matchbox to a cigar box, but --

INSERTS - CLOSE ON MACHINES

-- they all are alien in design, and they are all **attaching to different parts of the Fantasticar** --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - THE FANTASTIC FOUR

listen as the machines molecularly bore into the ship --

REED (ON INTERCOM)
-- they're coming in -- eject --

-- Reed hits a multiple eject switch, but nothing happens -- as he tries the ship computer, it won't respond --

JOHNNY
(tense)
-- why won't it work? --

REED
-- it's wired into the ship's controls --

As Reed says this --

THE FANTASTICAR FLIES DIRECTLY UPWARD

under the control of the devices which have taken over the ship --

-- and the cloud cover breaks as **the bottom of Doom's airship** pokes through -- the entry bay doors **iris open** -- and --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - BEN

starts SLAMMING against the side of the ship to get out -- and Johnny starts to flame on -- but this activates devices on the outside, one for each cockpit --

-- through an aperture drilled into each cockpit, an almost infinitesmal, barely visible trace of gas squirts in --

-- but as the trace swirls around the cockpit, it starts growing --

BEN
-- now what? Gas?

REED
-- not like you think -- it's replicating --
(realizes)
-- it's rebuilding the air molecules --

JOHNNY
-- into what?

REED
(fast)
-- could be cyanide -- could be anything --
try to hold your breath --

Reed takes in the biggest breath he can, expanding his lungs into balloons -- but as the ship moves up into Doom's craft, Reed can see in the other canopies that there's no hope: Ben is overcome first by the gas -- then Johnny -- and finally, Sue.

INSIDE DOOM'S SKYSHIP - THE FANTASTICAR

is guided via autopilot to the landing bay -- as it sets down --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - REED

can't hold his breath any longer -- he has to exhale, and takes in the gas that now fills the cockpit. As he loses consciousness --

REED'S POV - THROUGH THE SHIMMERING HAZE OF GAS

and his own slipping consciousness, the last thing he sees is **Doom**, standing triumphant in the landing bay -- as we --

FADE TO BLACK.

UP FROM BLACK SCREEN - WE HEAR

an echoing, plaintive voice -- the volume makes it sound close, but a tinny, mechanical quality makes it sound far away --

SUE (O.S., FILTERED)
-- Reed --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE - HE AWAKENS

in a mobile, sealed plexiglass cage: Reed is held by **hundreds of small metal claws** that cover him from head to toe to restrict his movement. The device is as medieval as it is futuristic, and it was designed with one purpose: to torment Reed Richards. Reed tries to move his head around, but can't see much --

WIDER ON INSIDE OF AIRSHIP - UPPER COMMAND LEVEL

Reed wakes to see a sub-orbital view of Earth from the windows, revealing they're not far from the East Coast. Standing by an array of monitors, including one that shows Sue, is **Doom** -- and the molecular rippling of his mask almost resembles a smile.

DOOM
It is inconsiderate of you to have slept so long, Dr. Richards.
(indicates monitor)
She has been waiting for hours to say goodbye before her death.

ON THE MONITOR - SUE

is also trapped in a unique torture device: she is surrounded by several dozen electrodes that unendingly fire lightning-like charges from all directions. Sue has a full-sphere force field surrounding her as insulation -- but her haggard look tells us the effort of keeping it up for hours has exhausted her.

IN THE PLEXIGLASS CAGE - REED ANGRILY WHIPS HIS HEAD AROUND

to Doom, and it is pulled back as a response by the metal claws --

REED
Where is she?

DOOM
Even nearer to Hell than you.

Doom gestures to a monitor labelled **HYDROBASE**, as we CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY - OUR VIEW DROPS THROUGH DARKENED WATER

-- finding a cylindrical building that bores into the rock of the ocean floor. Like all nano-creations, it has the seamless look of something sculpted from one piece. On top, an amphibious plane is docked, and spoking off from all sides are pipelines that run for miles in the distance. We DROP further, through the ceiling, and into a top level of machinery with access to the hatch of the plane, maintained by two Doombots -- below that, we DROP into --

-- the next level, which is smaller -- the structure has a conical design. We get a clear look at Sue's trap: the lightning bolts continue, and she too has a monitor in view, this one displaying Reed's horrified face. Our VIEW drops once more, stopping at --

-- the bottom level, where the conical design of the building narrows into a point. Spread-eagled across that point, held by a bizarre X-shaped metal device, is Johnny, also imprisoned in a plexiglass sphere, also in a great deal of pain.

Underneath him is a huge metal pipe that is channelling up heat to the X-contraption Johnny is imprisoned on -- and we can see that the heat is storing up in Johnny until he can't take it --

-- with a SCREAM, Johnny **releases heat energy** into the device --

ON TOP OF THE OCEAN FLOOR - THE PIPELINES CATCH THE HEAT

and **radiate it off into the distance in pulses of energy** -- as --

BACK IN DOOM'S AIRSHIP - REED

stretches painfully to see the monitor showing Johnny's trap.

REED
What are you doing to him?

DOOM
He is doing it, Dr. Richards. The apparatus underneath him is tapped into a geothermal vent, and it is funnelling up heat in excess of three thousand degrees.
(beat)
I am sure that you are aware his body is capable of storing fantastic quantities of heat, like a battery, and amplifying it --
(off Johnny's SCREAM)
-- until he overloads, and releases the heat into the ocean.

Reed maintains a poker face -- but Doom knows what he's thinking.

DOOM
You may discard hopes for his escape, Richards. The sphere he is encased in carefully and precisely regulates the oxygen content of the air. There is just enough for him to survive. If he attempts to turn that heat energy into flame -- he will asphyxiate.

REED
In the name of God -- why?

DOOM
In the name of **Doom** -- an object lesson.

Reed swivels his head around, as far as he can, to look at

REED'S POV - THE CONTROL PANELS OF THE AIRSHIP

show, beyond an array of controls that regulate the airship itself and the sub-oceanic base, more computer monitors, including a map that shows they are in close proximity to New York City --

-- one monitors **OCEAN TEMPERATURE: QUADRANT ONE - 169 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT**, and others show similar readings, all with **rising temperatures** -- another shows **WINDSPEED - 211 MILES PER HOUR** --

ON REED'S FACE

as he puts it all together -- but he still can't believe it --

REED
It's impossible --

DOOM
Trust your instinct, Dr. Richards --
(triumphant)
-- nothing is impossible to Doom.

REED
(stunned)
You're raising the ocean temperature over one hundred and fifty degrees in a thirty mile area -- and when it reacts to the colder air above it --
(still incredulous)
-- you'll create a hurricane.

DOOM
That is a mundane name for my instrument of peace. This storm will be remembered by the world as the first **hypercane** -- and the true dawn of my global reign.

As Doom gestures to the instruments and the windows, we look --

OUTSIDE THE AIRSHIP - AT A SUB-ORBITAL HEIGHT

-- we see Doom's airship is fifteen miles over the Atlantic Ocean -- and beneath it, the **white swirl of the storm has already formed** about a hundred miles away from New York City --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - DOOM FACES REED

proudly, pointing to the map, and the **WINDSPEED** monitor --

DOOM
Within two hours, the strength of the winds will increase to five hundred miles an hour -- and as it tracks into New York City --

REED
-- it'll be demolished. That storm could live for weeks, spinning all over the country -- and do more damage than a dozen atomic bombs.
(beat)
You'll kill millions -- tens of millions --

DOOM
(shrugs it off)
-- and rescue nearly four billion from the random tyranny of the world's governments. The annals of history will record that they died in the service of mankind.
(resigned)
I take no pleasure from their deaths. A regrettable, but necessary, step to insure that none dare oppose me.

REED
You think there won't be any resistance?

DOOM
With the gifts I offer mankind?
(certain)
No one will resist.

CUT TO:

INT. THE HYDROBASE - BOTTOM LEVEL - JOHNNY

is weakened -- only intense pain keeps him awake. But as heat filters through him, the entire structure is rocked by a **tremor** --

ON SUE'S LEVEL - THE TREMOR

shakes the walls and the floors -- but the equipment firing the lightning bolts at Sue continues unabated. As --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - A COMPUTER **ALARM**

goes off -- a monitor of the ocean base conditions reads --

HEAT GENERATOR - CRITICAL

Doom reacts with little more than clinical interest --

DOOM
Fascinating. I was certain that your companions would expire long before the heat destroyed the structure.
(offhand)
Their survival to this point has served Doom well, but their tasks are complete. His, as the final circuit for the hypercane --

On the screen monitoring Johnny's trap, we see and hear **another tremor** -- the screen **blanks out into white noise** -- and Doom gestures to Sue's monitor.

DOOM
-- and hers, as the first step of an eternity of torment for **you.**

Reed, anguished, turns his head to the monitor -- and another growing **tremor rumbles through the room** -- walls are visibly crumbling, and Sue turns to the camera --

SUE (ON MONITOR)
-- Reed -- I lo--

Before she can say it, a **blast** destroys the camera --

REED
-- **NOOOOOOOOOO** --

Doom's **laugh** grows as loud as Reed's scream -- as we --

CUT TO:

INT. THE HYDROBASE - THE BOTTOM LEVEL IS ROCKED BY TREMORS

and clearly isn't going to last very long -- within the plexiglass sphere, Johnny is still alive. Falling wreckage from the ceilings and walls tumble onto the sphere, but they won't shatter the glass -- Johnny's going to have to get out of this himself.

IN THE SPHERE - JOHNNY IS TRAPPED IN THE METAL BONDS

of the heat siphon -- but as the room around him collapses, we can see Johnny is concentrating and holding his breath --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S RIGHT HAND - **A SMALL FOCUSED FLAME**

shoots out of his fingertip -- he strains to get it long enough to reach the side of the sphere, and hot enough to go through --

-- the flame reaches the glass with the tiniest of sizzles -- it's clearly meant to withstand extreme heat -- as --

IN THE LEVEL ABOVE - SUE

is in a similar predicament -- the room is caving in, but the device that has her trapped is still fully operational, firing lightning bolts from all directions. Beneath her --

IN THE SPHERE - JOHNNY IS ABOUT TO PASS OUT

from lack of oxygen, but his flame has almost burnt a hole through the glass -- there's one thin layer to go as his flame dies out --

-- Johnny struggles to keep the flame alive -- and with the last bit of flame he can summon, and the last trace of oxygen --

-- the flame burns a dime-sized hole in the glass -- as the sphere's vacuum is broken, **air rushes into the sphere** --

-- and the pent-up heat inside **Johnny ignites in an explosion of flame that blows the sphere and the heat siphon to bits!**

Johnny enjoys one deep breath before blasting up, burning a hole in the ceiling ahead of him just as the level's walls cave in --

IN THE NEXT LEVEL - SUE IS TRAPPED

in the lightning field, but Johnny burns up through the floor -- and in seconds, his fireballs destroy the lightning apparatus.

Exhausted, Sue drops her force field and falls to her knees -- and Johnny helps her up with an unflamed hand. But the structure is hit with another **tremor** -- Johnny looks very uncertain --

JOHNNY
-- Now what?

SUE
They took us down in some kind of amphibious plane -- it may still be up there --

JOHNNY
-- Hold on!

Johnny grabs Sue's hand and flies up toward the ceiling, **burning an escape hole through it** -- both of them fly up to --

THE TOP LEVEL OF THE HYDROBASE - SUE AND JOHNNY FLY UP

to find the level is wrecked -- even the two Doombots lie buried. But Johnny sees a ladder for the docking hatch of the plane --

JOHNNY
There's the hatch -- we're outta here.
(smiles at Sue)
It doesn't come much closer than that, huh?

Just then, a ceiling crack gives way -- and a **high pressure jet of water blasts** through the ceiling, **extinguishing Johnny's flame** -- he and Sue **fall fifteen feet to the wreckage of the floor** --

-- and the ceiling crack, under pressure of millions of tons of water, **spreads -- until the entire ceiling collapses on Sue and Johnny, with the ocean rushing in right behind it** --

ON SUE AND JOHNNY - AS THE WATER FLOODS IN

-- Sue **forms a force field bubble** around herself and Johnny, with the last of the air in the room -- in a second, they're **surrounded** by the ocean, and the pressure even pushes Sue's bubble **inward** --

-- but the current also shoves the bubble up against what's left of the ceiling, against the hatchway to the plane -- the force field bubble **bonds with it** so they have a momentary safe passage --

THE BUBBLE AND THE AMPHIPLANE FLIP END OVER END

as they are hurled up by the water, but they hold together at the plane's underside -- Johnny forces open the hatch and climbs in -- as Sue is drawn into the plane by Johnny, the force field bubble **collapses** behind her, and its air bursts up -- as --

INSIDE THE AMPHIBIOUS PLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE

both struggle into their seats, as the ship is tossed around the water. Johnny eyes the odd, Doom-designed controls uncertainly --

SUE
Can you fly this thing?

JOHNNY
(has no idea)
Ab-so-lutely --

Johnny tentatively throws a switch -- and nothing happens. As --

IN THE OCEAN - THE CURRENT IS DRIVING THE SHIP

very quickly toward the **solid wall** of a canyon -- we see it pulverize one chunk of debris.

IN THE SHIP - JOHNNY SEES THE WALL COMING UP FAST

-- and as he eyes the controls, you can almost hear him think "eeny meeny minie moe" -- finally, he throws another switch --

-- and the ship **powers up** -- Johnny pulls back on the stick, and the ship tracks up one second before hitting the wall -- just as they pull up, another chunk of debris **shatters** against the wall.

AS THE SHIP GOES UP - JOHNNY

can see from the brightening light ahead in the water that they're almost to the surface. Once again, he's his own biggest hero --

JOHNNY
(shouts)
Yee-haaaaaaaaaaaa --
(turns to Sue)
Now that is as close as they come --

But as soon as the ship reaches the surface --

THE AMPHIBIOUS PLANE FLIES OUT OF THE WATER AND INTO THE STORM

and it's tossed around by three hundred mile an hour winds -- they're near the inner center of the eyewall of the hypercane.

INSIDE THE PLANE - JOHNNY

struggles as the plane is flipped around like a half-dollar -- ultimately, Johnny pulls the plane level, and a few stomach-wrenching moments later, guides the plane out of the intense winds of the eyewall, and into the bizarre, totally windless calm of

THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE - THE PLANE SPIRALS UP IT

-- and from inside, we get a sense of the enormity of this thing -- it's a tight, narrow eye that goes up at least ten miles.

INSIDE THE PLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE LOOK OUT AT THE EYEWALL

in complete awe -- nobody's ever seen a storm like this. It is as endless as it is ferocious, and the obsidian sides of the eyewall are veined with the erratic red, blue and green lightning blasts found only in extreme storms. Johnny and Sue are safe for now, but they're powerless to stop the storm. As they circle up the eye --

CUT TO:

INT. DOOM'S AIRSHIP - A MULTIMIRRORED DOME CHAMBER - BEN

is standing, weak but awake, imprisoned by thick, powerful bonds that hold him in the dome's center. Above Ben, the dome is lined with thousands of mirrors, and tens of thousands of microlasers. At the sound of an electronic door WHISKING open, Ben looks up --

DOOM

enters regally -- and crosses over to Ben.

DOOM
You hate me, don't you, Grimm?
(no answer)
You believe that I am responsible for your monstrous appearance.

BEN
Look who's talkin'. From what I can see, Doc, that mask is your best invention yet.

DOOM
(totally unaffected)
True, Grimm. Behind this mask I am as malformed as you. We have much in common. We both owe a debt of misery to Reed Richards. He alone is to blame for the incident that scarred us both. But while I have evolved into a superior being that transcends humanity --
(beat)
-- you have been robbed of it, along with the simplest joys of ordinary life -- for example, the touch of a woman --

This touches a nerve with Ben -- but he tries to cover it --

BEN
I think you got more in common with Richards than you think --
(beat)
-- the both of you can bore me right into a coma in no time flat.

DOOM
Would your boredom lessen if I told you that it is within my power to restore your previous form?

Ben is thunderstruck -- but tries regardless to maintain a poker face. He wants his humanity back -- but he doesn't want to show Doom how badly. Doom continues to walk around the lab --

DOOM
When your body was transformed, it ran through twenty-three seperate reconstructive cycles, each building on the last, each involving trillions of bits of data. It would be impossible to calculate the odds of blindly working backwards to reverse it -- or what kind of abomination you might become if the attempt were made.
(beat)
However, when I crashed into the mountains of Latveria, with the remains of my earlier, primitive nanochamber, much of the equipment survived -- including --
(he picks up a cartridge)
-- the complete record of your transformation.

Doom holds the data cartridge up as if he's holding Ben's soul -- and in spite of himself, that's just the way Ben is looking at it.

DOOM
Every single atom of what you once were is contained in this cartridge. It is a simple matter, using this, and the nanochamber you stand in, to reverse your condition.

As Doom slots the cartridge into the computer bank, Ben looks up at the mirror dome. This is a nanochamber, far advanced over the previous model. Ben looks to Doom sarcastically --

BEN
Gee -- that's my cue to beg, right, Doc?

DOOM
On the contrary, Grimm. I am asking you.
(serious)
Richards only valued you, insofar as he valued you at all, for your great strength. I, on the other hand, recognize that you have other strategic potentials, with your training as a fighter pilot and an astronaut, that can be more fully realized under my guidance.
(beat)
At the same time, I empathize with your condition. I have nostalgically toyed with the idea of returning to what I once was. But my current molecular state is too --
complex -- to ever be reversed.
(direct)
Join me -- and let me give you what Richards has taken from you. Humanity.

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

Ben's morals, and his loyalties, are crumbling away under this appeal. Ben's last stab at bravado:

BEN
Nah. I got a better idea. How about you lemme out of here, and I try taking you apart and puttin' you back together again?

DOOM

steps back from the chamber --

DOOM
As you wish.

-- Doom waves his hand at the computer, and two things happen: the computer bank comes to life -- and Ben's shackles unlatch. His hands are free, and he can obviously leave at will.

DOOM
This nanochamber has one notable improvement -- it is activated from within.
(beat)
The computer is warming up. In ten seconds, it will erase the data cartridge. Only you can stop it -- if you choose to activate the chamber, and reverse your condition.
(indicates switch in chamber)
The choice is yours.

-- as the mirrored dome above Ben **lights up** --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

-- as he's backed into deciding between everything he knows is wrong, and everything he could ever want. Torn by indecision, Ben tries to hold back -- but he sees --

BEN'S POV - THE COMPUTER BANK

a monitor over the data cartridge counts down -- **MOLECULAR DATA ERASURE:04** -- and **:03** -- **:02** --

BEN

hates himself, but he has to do it -- he throws the switch --

-- and the data cartridge erasure is cancelled, as transparent shields drop down, sealing Ben in an octagonal booth --

IN THE MIRRORED DOME - BEN IS TRANSFORMED

by a blue laser parabola refracting from the mirrors, altering his body, aspect by aspect: he loses his orange pigmentation in one cycle -- in another, his stone skin softens into hide --

AT THE CONTROL PANEL - A MONITOR

reads **TRANSFORMATION CYCLE - NEGATIVE**, with a bar graph that shows a decreasing percentage as the changes effect --

CLOSE ON BEN

-- as he becomes, recognizably, human: his hide becomes skin, his proportions shrink, and the restoration is so precise that his hair returns, as does a cut on his face from the station.

Abruptly, the lasers cut out and the machinery shuts down -- and Ben looks at his restored body in disbelief, assaulted by a wave of conflicting emotions.

He wanted this more than anything -- but not this way. He already regrets it -- and his regret is underlined by Doom's cutting **LAUGH** -- Ben looks up to see --

ACROSS THE LAB - **REED**

is brought in by a pair of Doombots, his cage floating magnetically -- he looks physically and emotionally drained, drooping across the inside of the cage like a captured flag.

DOOM
As I told you, Richards. No one will resist.
(cutting)
If your friend, with all of his strength, would willingly join me -- then who will oppose me elsewhere?

The Doombots drag Ben out. Ben, ashamed, looks at Reed --

BEN
-- I'm -- I'm sorry, Reed --

REED
(weakly, with difficulty)
-- all right -- don't blame you --

Doom, obviously, is savoring every bit of this.

DOOM
You should be proud, Grimm. In proving my point, you have served Doom as honorably as your other companions.

As the Doombots drag Ben off, he turns to Reed --

BEN
What -- what's he talkin' about?

Reed lifts his face, miserably and utterly defeated, toward Ben --

REED
-- Johnny -- Sue -- they're --

Reed trails off -- he can't make himself say it -- but the stunned look on Ben's face shows he can finish the sentence. So can Doom --

DOOM
(casually)
Their service to Doom has concluded. As has yours.
(to Doombots)
Dispose of him.

The Doombots drag Ben out the door -- as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. **THE HYPERCANE'S OUTER EDGE - OVER WATER** - DAY

The omnidirectional ROAR is deafening -- and for the first time, we see the outside of this storm. Take the most frightening shot of hurricane footage you've ever seen -- and multiply it. The hypercane is twice as tall, four times as strong, and moving five times as fast as the strongest recorded hurricanes.

It's eight miles high, and the tight knot of the storm, with winds howling at four hundred miles an hour, advances at sixty miles an hour: essentially, the short way of describing this is as a tornado with the circumference of Los Angeles County.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK - YANCY STREET BAR - DAY - THE TELEVISION

is tuned to a news bulletin -- and something about the unusually shaken look of the WEATHERMAN draws the attention of everyone, as he points to an offshore storm and a map of the northeast --

WEATHERMAN (ON TELEVISION)
-- the thing to remember with a storm like this is, not to panic. But the fact is, no -- no one has ever seen a storm like this --
(rattled, points to map)
It developed from nowhere in just a few hours -- and it's moving on a direct track toward New York at sixty miles an hour, with sustained winds of 400 miles an hour --

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK CITY HIGHRISE - WINDOW VIEW OF OCEAN - DAY

Several workers are gaping out a window -- in the distance --

-- the skies are blue and perfectly clear -- everything looks fine -- except that in the distance, an **enormous, destructive black column** like no one has ever seen is beginning to draw closer, getting wider and taller in the horizon. As we --

CUT TO:

INT. DOOM'S AIRSHIP - LOWER DOCKING LEVEL - DAY - BEN IS SHOVED

out of a gantry door by two Doombots, into the ship's bottom level: a circular level containing smaller crafts such as Doom's Sky-Sled, mounted in racks in the walls. As a Doombot operates a control panel, thirty feet beneath these circular catwalks --

THE CIRCULAR SEGMENTED DOCKING DOOR

that the Fantasticar was captured in **irises open** with a groan and a RUSH of air -- revealing a fifteen mile drop to the Atlantic.

AT THE TOP OF THE CATWALK - BEN LOOKS DOWN

as the air blasts up -- it's obvious that he's here to, literally, walk the plank: the wall's catwalk has a protrusion in the center with no protective rail. A Doombot shoves Ben forward -- but --

-- Ben sees a rack of machinery on one side, with a panel held in place by a metal bar the size of a baseball bat. Before the Doombot can grab him, Ben **dives for the rack** to **grab the bar** --

-- The Doombot reaches for a laser gun -- but just as it raises the gun, Ben swings the bar and connects, knocking the Doombot slightly off balance. More importantly, the gun goes flying --

-- and clatters across the catwalk, stopping at the end of the "plank", perilously close to falling off.

With just a second to react as the other Doombot reaches for its gun, Ben dives onto the plank, rolls, and grabs the gun before it can fall, coming up in a perfect ready-to-shoot pose worthy of a Kirby cover -- but as he smiles and fires the gun at the Doombot --

-- nothing comes out but a couple of loud clicks. Ben looks at his hand: apparently this gun is good for posing and nothing else --

IN THE DOOMBOT'S HAND - THE LASER GUN

fires laser blasts at Ben, and we can see it draws its power from a **battery terminal** in the Doombot's hand --

ON THE CATWALK - BEN

is driven back, dodging the Doombot's blasts -- off balance, he **falls** with a fast-fading **YELL** --

ON BEN FALLING TOWARD THE DOCKING HOLE

-- Ben, the useless gun and the metal bar fall towards nothing --

AT THE CATWALK RAIL - THE DOOMBOTS

bend over to scan down and confirm that Ben is gone -- they turn back unemotionally, their task complete. But --

UNDERNEATH THE SHIP - BEN IS HANGING ONTO THE METAL BAR

which has one end wedged in between two of the retracted segments of the enormous door. Ben is, barely, hanging onto the other end beneath the ship, literally flapping in the breeze. Suddenly --

-- the door's segments **grind to life** slowly, but with enough force that they bend the bar and cut it in half -- it drops away --

-- and Ben is just able to reach up for one of the segments -- but the segment he's grabbed is about to **grind** closed against another segment, and if Ben gets caught in the middle, the top half of him is going to be in the airship and the bottom half is fish food --

-- struggling against the slick metal, Ben **pulls himself up** over the edge just before he's scissored in half -- and --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - BEN

rolls back on the segment as the rest shut the rest of the way, shaken, but momentarily safe. He starts to climb up, as we go to --

INT. NEW YORK HIGHRISE - OFFICE WINDOW - THE WORKERS

are gaping out again, now more afraid -- because --

IN THE HORIZON - **THE HYPERCANE**

-- what seemed merely odd not long ago is now monstrous, fully taking up half of the view, and blackening the sky. For all its enormity, it is still one hundred miles away. When it arrives, it will clearly engulf the city. For a different view we go back to --

DOOM'S MAIN CONTROL LEVEL - DOOM

is staring out the window, a safe distance above the atmospheric swirl of the hypercane. From this vantage, the storm almost appears to be on the East Coast. Back from the window, hovering in place, is Reed's case-prison.

DOOM
Fifty thousand centuries ago, the last storm of this scale scoured away the dinosaurs -- allowing man to advance in the wreckage. Slowly. Haltingly. Randomly.
(thoughtfully)
This time, man will emerge as a greater being. A perfect being of my own design.

REED
(contemptous)
You really believe it, don't you? That you're a god?

Doom's certainty remains unshaken -- he bends closer to the case --

DOOM
The power to create, or to annihilate absolutely --
(beat)
Enlighten me, Dr. Richards -- what capabilities are possessed by God that are not also possessed by Doom?

Reed doesn't even try to debate this lunatic. Two Doombots arrive, mutely bringing in another magnetically hovering plexiglass case. We'll note that it is exactly the same size as Reed's prison --

-- but as the Doombots guide it closer, we see that the inside of the case is segmented into four dozen equally sized cubes --

DOOM
In another life, you told me that if our experiments were successful, that they would be allowed to proceed with living subjects --

-- and as the case is moved, we see the cubes in the case **contain bio-nano test material**, with labels like "**BIO-NANO DISASSEMBLER:** SEQUENCE 3.12". Reed realizes what this means -- as --

WITHIN REED'S CASE - A SEGMENTER PINS HIM TO THE GLASS

so that Reed's body is separated into four dozen individual "cubes" that match the test case -- meaning Doom intends to very scientifically try at least forty-eight types of death on Reed. Now completely immobilized, Reed can't move or speak at all --

DOOM
-- I respect you for living up to your word.

As Doom prepares to hook up the cases --

OUTSIDE DOOM'S CONTROL CENTER - BEN'S POV

-- Ben can see that Reed is in pretty dire straits, and from the looks of the hypercane's status screens -- "**WINDSPEED: 441 MILES PER HOUR**", "**LANDFALL: 05:14:01**" -- so are a lot of other people.

IN A CORRIDOR - BEN WATCHES FROM A SAFE DISTANCE

-- he's still winded from his climb, and he's determined to do something, but realistically, he's human again, he's unarmed, and for that matter, all he's wearing is a pair of baggy blue trunks. Before he can begin to formulate a plan, he hears the SOUND of --

-- a Doombot is twenty feet away -- and it's detected him.

As it reaches for and raises its laser weapon, Ben runs down the corridor, just ahead of a series of laser blasts that perforate the walls behind him. Still running, Ben tries to get around the airship's central gantry --

-- but he runs headlong into another Doombot, which draws on him. Caught between two opposing volleys, Ben is driven forward into --

THE AIRSHIP'S CENTRAL GANTRY ELEVATOR - BEN PUNCHES THE BUTTON

and it starts up, but Ben isn't even allowed a moment's respite -- **two blasts fire up from the elevator's floor** -- because --

THE DOOMBOTS ARE FLYING UP THE SHAFT

after the elevator car --

INSIDE THE ELEVATOR CAR - BEN FLATTENS AGAINST THE WALL

as laser blasts fire up past him -- after a very long moment, the car reaches the top level and stops --

ON THE TOP LEVEL - BEN HURLS HIMSELF OUT OF THE ELEVATOR

just before the blasts completely melt it into a tangle -- with no time to recover, Ben runs into --

ONE OF THE LABORATORIES - BEN CLOSES THE SLIDING METAL DOOR

-- it SLAMS down just as the Doombots emerge from the elevator's wreckage nearby. Ben seals the door by SMASHING the controls, which spark out. Ben looks around for defensive weapons -- there are none. He finally realizes this is the lab that contains --

THE NANOCHAMBER

that returned his humanity -- or could turn him back into the Thing. The **BOOMING** of the Doombots against the door grows louder --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

as he wrestles with two lousy options: to definitely get slaughtered as a man, or perhaps to live on as a hideous monster. It's a choice no one would ever want to make -- and he's got maybe three seconds to decide. Ultimately, only one choice is possible --

Ben turns to the control panel -- it still has the data cartridge for his last transformation -- and working the controls within, Ben activates the chamber. The plexiglass shutters drop down, and the laser matrix weaves under the mirrors --

ON THE CONTROL PANEL - A COMPUTER BAR GRAPH

advances as one monitor reads "**TRANSFORMATION CYCLE - POSITIVE**" --

CLOSE ON BEN - **THE TRANSFORMATION IS TEARING HIM APART**

and rebuilding him, cycle by painful cycle --

IN THE CORRIDOR - THE DOOMBOTS

are pounding the lab door in -- they're practically there, when the dented remains of the door are **ripped away** from inside --

THE THING

is back -- and he looks completely unimpressed with the Doombots.

BEN
Sorry it took so long to answer, guys --
(flings door aside)
-- I was busy changin'.

Ben rears back a fist, and **uppercuts one of the Doombots** -- it **flies apart** against the ceiling like a crash test dummy, as --

IN THE COMMAND LEVEL - **DOOM**

is starting the tests on Reed, whose confinement against the glass makes him look like a painting Dali started and Picasso finished. But the **SOUND** of the fight makes Doom look up in surprise -- and

A DISMEMBERED DOOMBOT CRASHES THROUGH THE CEILING LIKE A MISSILE

with so much momentum that it **also smashes through an outer wall** of the airship, falling out of sight --

-- the shock of it knocks Reed's cage to the side -- as it caroms off a wall, a corner of the plexiglass cracks --

CLOSE ON ONE SEGMENT - **REED'S EYE**

narrows in concentration, recognizing the opportunity -- as --

DOOM

angrily stares up at the hole above him -- and with a THOOM that shakes the level, Ben drops down opposite a disbelieving Doom --

DOOM
It's impossible --

BEN
Reality check, Doc.
(beat)
It ain't a dream -- it ain't a hoax -- it ain't even an imaginary story --
(advances on Doom)
-- It's clobberin' time --

At that moment --

IN THE GLASS CASE - REED HAS PUSHED ALL HIS MASS INTO ONE CORNER

against the bulging crack, until it **bursts** in a small hole --

-- and Reed's body shoots out in a long single strand, like a toothpaste tube run over by a steamroller. Reed assumes his ordinary shape, weak, woozy, and holding his head -- just as --

BEN STALKS TOWARD DOOM

with his fists clenched, but Doom looks calm -- because, one second before Ben's fist drops on Doom like a hammer --

-- the floor under Doom opens in a clean, molecular aperture. Doom drops into the next level as the hole weaves shut behind him.

Ben, frustrated and incredulous, looks down at the floor --

BEN
Damn it -- what does this joker do, carry around a bag o' holes like Wile E. Coyote?

Reed, recovering, moves over to the control panels of the ship --

REED
I'm not sure who you're referring to, Ben, but the rest is perfectly obvious.
(beat)
Doom appears to have mental control of the nanotechnology in his armor through amplified brain signals broadcast to individual molecules. Similarly, this aircraft was built through nanotechnology -- ergo, Doom has simply increased his mental signal sufficiently to give him total local control over the ship's molecules.

BEN
(blankly)
I'll make you a deal. When we get out of this, I'll tell you who Wile E. Coyote is, if you tell me what you think "obvious" means.

Reed looks at Ben's form, and realizes the sacrifice he's made --

REED
Ben -- I'm sorry you had to go back to --

BEN
(cuts him off)
Don't be. Right before we blow this joint, you're gonna run me through that microwave one last time, on the "Ben Grimm" setting. Meantime --
(he kneels over floor)
-- I guess I'm old-fashioned, but I still like makin' holes the hard way.

Ben **slams his fist** down, punching a hole that he tears back into a hatch. Ben drops in, as --

REED IS AT THE CONTROLS

stretching his neck to scan the bizarre monitors -- at the same time, he sees the hypercane miles beneath him at the window, from this vantage appearing to be virtually upon New York. Against the swirling cloud of the eye -- a black speck flies out --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

as he realizes what this could mean -- he whips his neck along the control panel, finding a radio control -- as --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE SPIRAL UP THE EYEWALL

over the spectacular, erratic blue and green lightning that BOOMS through the eyewall -- from their vantage, they can see Doom's airship high above them. Just then, the radio opens up --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
Sue -- Johnny -- are you there?

Startled, but elated, Sue flips a radio mike switch --

SUE
-- Reed -- We just managed to get out --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - REED

smiles as widely as only he can in relief --

REED
Thank God you're all right --

JOHNNY (O.S., RADIO)
Uh, I don't want to spoil the moment, kids --

LONG SHOT - THE HYPERCANE WHIRLS ON

-- and from this perspective, we can see how both the amphiplane and Doom's airship look like insects compared to the storm.

JOHNNY (O.S., RADIO)
-- but we've still got a little problem here.

IN THE AIRSHIP'S LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - BEN

is stomping through, looking for Doom, who is nowhere to be seen.

BEN
(shouting)
Hey -- Doom --

Just then, a Doombot rushes at Ben -- but Ben casually **crushes** the Doombot's head and swats it aside, without breaking stride.

BEN
Come on out, ya dimestore Darth Vader --

A SOUND makes Ben look down one end of the level -- and he sees --

AT THE END OF THE LEVEL - A CONFIDENT DOOM

is flanked by a different robot. This one is about eight feet tall, of smooth, featureless chrome. Undaunted, Ben marches on --

BEN
I don't blame ya for hidin' behind robots, Doom -- but these pugs wouldn't win a bout against my Aunt Petunia.

DOOM
(unconcerned)
This model is advanced far beyond my servile Doombots, Grimm. It is an offensive weapon that mimics the molecular structure of its opponents. It is called an Adaptoid.
(casually)
It has already been exposed to the molecular structures of your companions --

Ben is still a dozen feet away -- but before he can reach the Adaptoid, it raises one smooth, featureless hand --

-- and it **molecularly alters** from chrome into a fist. As Ben's jaw drops, the Adaptoid's fist **bursts into flames**, and **stretches ten feet** for a powerful, fiery blow that knocks Ben back --

DOOM
-- now, you have made it fully functional.

Dazed, Ben watches as the Adaptoid's fist **mimics Ben's molecular structure** -- its chrome ripples into an orange, rocky hide that is simultaneously capable of flaming on and stretching --

-- and **the fiery, rocky fist stretches across the level** to hammer Ben with a blow that knocks him across the level. Meanwhile --

AT THE CONTROL LEVEL - REED

is bent over the controls, his mind racing -- until it hits him.

JOHNNY (O.S., RADIO)
Come on, buddy -- there's got to be a way --

REED (INTO RADIO)
There is. A hurricane is a heat engine. That's how Doom created it to begin with.
(eying controls)
Doom's airship has a supply of sub-atomic thermal bombs on board. If I can fly directly over the eye and drop the bombs into it, they could generate enough heat to overload it, forcing the storm to strengthen --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE

-- Johnny is incredulous, but Sue's starting to see it.

JOHNNY (INTO RADIO)
Strengthen it? Oh, that's a great idea --

SUE
(cuts in, excited)
Johnny, don't you see? If the storm picks up enough heat, the eyewall will narrow down until it collapses in on itself --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
-- right -- the hypercane's own winds will tear itself apart at the core.

Johnny laughs with relief and grabs the radio --

JOHNNY
Excellent! Reed, you are, without a doubt, the master of disaster! I'll get this heap out of your way --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
It's -- not going to be that simple, Johnny.

Sue realizes what Reed's heading toward -- she grabs the radio --

SUE
-- Reed -- no --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
-- I've calculated that the bombs alone will provide only a fraction of the thermal energy needed. There's only one chance --
(beat)
-- if you amplify the flame into a nova blast.
(beat)
Do you understand what it means if you do?

Johnny knows exactly what this means -- the bottom just dropped out of his self-confidence. He's afraid -- this has moved a long way past fun and games. But he looks down at the storm --

JOHNNY'S POV - **THE HYPERCANE IS PRACTICALLY ON NEW YORK**

-- the tight knot of the churning storm is almost on the coast.

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S FACE

as he realizes there's no other choice. Johnny keys the radio --

JOHNNY
I understand what it means if I don't.
(beat)
I'll be ready when you are, Reed.

CUT TO:

INT. DOOM'S AIRSHIP - LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - BEN

is getting up from the punch, woozy -- but he can see nothing -- there's no visibile sign of the Adaptoid.

There is, however, the WHOOSHING sound of something flying around him -- Ben looks around, puzzled -- until suddenly --

-- **the Adaptoid ripples out of invisibility and into view in mid-air**, flying right in front of Ben, **hurling fireballs at him** -- as Ben staggers back, the Adaptoid delivers another flaming, stretching, rocky punch, flattening Ben against an equipment wall.

Ben is getting hammered, but he's also getting mad -- he picks up a loose metal girder, and as the Adaptoid flies over again --

-- Ben swings the bar to hit the Adaptoid broadside, knocking it off course -- as it's knocked away, it momentarily mimics the metal where it was hit, then returns to normal after a second, as if it were trying on and then rejecting that molecular structure.

Ben gets a second wind and raises the girder --

BEN
C'mere, ya carbon copycat -- I got plenty more where that came from --

But just as Ben charges the Adaptoid --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE - THE PRISM OF A FORCE FIELD

appears around Ben's head, forming an **airtight bubble that cuts off Ben's oxygen** -- gasping, Ben is now completely helpless.

CUT TO:

INSIDE CONTROL LEVEL - AT PANEL - REED

is bent over the panel, with ten stretched fingers independently dancing over as many different keyboards and dials under controls labelled **NAVIGATION SYSTEM** and **WEAPONS PROGRAMMING** -- when --

-- Reed turns -- he can hear someone approaching from behind. Time's up -- he can't be discovered at the controls. Reed finishes the final command and hits "enter", moving away as --

AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE LEVEL - **DOOM** ENTERS

glaring across at Reed -- Doom raises his gun and FIRES --

-- but Reed evades the blast by elongating and swerving his body -- as Doom FIRES again, Reed's lengthened body zips into the ductwork of the ceiling, and serpentines toward Doom --

-- Doom, enraged, FIRES up into the ceiling at Reed, but Reed is able to swerve through the machinery and dodge the blasts --

-- and as one BLAST burns a hole in the ceiling ahead of him, Reed snakes his body up into it, into the level above --

DOOM

furiously moves to an exit to follow Reed -- as we GO TO --

THE LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - BEN IS ASPHYXIATING

as he lurches back, choking. On the other side of the level, the Adaptoid flies in an arc of fire, circling for a killing blow --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

He's practically unconscious from the lack of air -- but as he looks back at the other end of the laboratory, he gets an idea -- and he turns back around --

BEN'S POV - THE ADAPTOID BLAZES DIRECTLY TOWARD HIM

building momentum -- as it flies closer --

BEN GRABS THE METAL GIRDER

and with the last of his strength, vaults the Adaptoid up toward an opposite laboratory wall -- in that second, the Adaptoid takes on the form of the alloy where it was hit, then rejects it --

-- but its momentum forces the Adaptoid to crash into a wall that is lined from floor to ceiling with a **glass cabinet that is filled with laboratory Pyrex** -- as all of it shatters, the Adaptoid **falls to the floor, covered from head to toe in broken glass** --

-- and in the one split second that the Adaptoid **mimics the glass molecular structure** --

BEN

still cut off from his air supply, turns to **hurl the metal girder like a javelin** -- the girder connects -- and

THE "GLASS" ADAPTOID SHATTERS

into thousands of pieces that **explode** all over the level!

CLOSE ON BEN - THE FORCE FIELD

around his head evaporates. Ben breathes deeply and looks around --

THE LABORATORY LEVEL - THE FRAGMENTS OF THE ADAPTOID

are everywhere, but they are chaotically taking on different forms -- some metal, some glass, some like Ben's hide -- but it's clear they're not going to reassemble. Meanwhile --

IN THE UPPER NANOCHAMBER LEVEL - **DOOM** STEPS INTO THE LABORATORY

with his gun ready -- but as he walks in --

-- Reed springs out, with one arm whipping around Doom's laser hand to throw it to the side, as his other hand forms into a **sledgehammer** -- for someone with no penchant for violence, Reed does a great job of **slamming Doom in the face** with the "hammer" --

-- Doom drops the gun, but he is enraged enough to also drag this down to a physical plane: Doom's armored hand clubs Reed in a savage backhand that knocks Reed's neck back a dozen feet --

-- Reed's twisted expression shows how much this hurt -- but he **whips his head back** to **powerfully head-butt** Doom -- not just once, the way it's usually done, but with three rapid-fire volleys --

-- Doom is knocked back, dazed, with a hint of blood behind the mask -- but he strikes Reed again, electrifying his glove --

-- as Reed falls back, weakened -- we see --

IN THE AIRSHIP CONTROL LEVEL - ON THE MONITOR PANEL

We can see out the front windows that the airship is now precisely over the hypercane's eye. A monitor tracking the airship's movement shows **TARGET LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE REACHED** -- a second reads **THERMAL BOMBS - PRIMED AND ACTIVATED** --

OUTSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - A LOWER CHUTE DOOR GRINDS OPEN

-- an atomic warhead sized bomb is shoved out into freefall -- as

IN THE AMPHIBIOUS PLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE

look up -- they're just above the eye, but two miles beneath Doom's airship, and they can see the bombs falling toward them. Johnny knows it's showtime -- he grabs the floor hatch handle, looking up to a very worried Sue at the controls.

JOHNNY
Sue -- when this is over --
(tries for a joke)
-- make sure the Post doesn't run one of their stupid headlines, like "Storm Kayos Storm" -- or something about going out in a blaze of glory --

SUE
(barely holding it together)
You don't have to do this -- you're going to wind up d--

JOHNNY
-- Stop it -- Just stop it, all right? I'm scared enough already --
(serious)
You're the one who's been telling me since this happened that I should use this power to do something important. Well -- guess what --
(smiles ruefully)
-- for the first time ever, I'm actually going to do what you say.

Johnny opens the lower hatch -- and Sue looks more worried than ever. Johnny tries to be reassuring, but both their faces show one thing: they are both absolutely certain Johnny won't survive this.

JOHNNY
Don't give me that look -- I'm coming back.
(beat)
Somebody's got to watch out for my sister.

Johnny musters a cocky smile that's all show -- he suddenly drops out of the hatch feet first, unflamed --

-- and Sue fights tears as she pulls the plane sharply up --

WIDE VIEW OVER THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE

The amphiplane is tracking up and away quickly, and six thermal bombs are falling in a perfect line, spaced apart by hundreds of yards. Falling alongside the first is Johnny, still unflamed --

VIEW LOOKING UP - CLOSE ON JOHNNY DIVING INTO HYPERCANE'S EYE

Johnny falls into this enormous, dark cylinder, lightning BOOMING all around him, but his face shows no more fear -- just total, complete determination to do this right, as he darts his body like a skydiver to fall ahead of the first bomb into the eye.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - UPPER EAST SIDE - PANIC

The hypercane has darkened the skies -- and the storm is now visible from any point in the city, as it dwarfs the skyscrapers. The ROAR of the storm is deafening, drowning out all other noise -- and the accelerating wind HOWLING through the buildings, now at least at sixty miles an hour, is pummeling people on the ground. The streets are snarled with abandoned cars, and people are fleeing the storm on foot, but it's hopeless. Meanwhile --

IN DOOM'S AIRSHIP - IN THE UPPER NANO LABORATORY - **A BLOODIED DOOM**

moves over Reed, battered in the corner. Doom is also weakened, but he has regained his laser pistol --

DOOM
I regret only one thing, Richards --
(aims down)
-- that I now cannot give you the slow death you deserve.

But as Doom is about to finish the job -- we CUT TO:

ANGLE LOOKING UP THE EYE - NEAR THE BOTTOM - JOHNNY

is still unflamed and still plummeting ahead of the bombs, which we can see stretch up the entire length of the eyewall. Johnny is falling fast, maybe three hundred yards over the ocean --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S FACE

which is ripped back by the velocity of the ten mile fall -- not as a game or a battle cry, just as a starting point, he says --

JOHNNY
-- flame on --

THE HUMAN TORCH IGNITES

and **arcs around in a full turn to head straight up** -- Johnny passes by the first bomb **just as it explodes** --

-- the first thermal bomb blooms into **a tremendous ball of fire that fills the circumference of the hypercane's eye** -- and

INSIDE THE FIREBALL - JOHNNY

is riding up and through the flames -- and at the same time that the fireball is surging and the heat's concussion is **blasting** Johnny upward, we can see that **Johnny's body is drawing in the heat** of the fireball -- he's **absorbing** it as he rises, in a process that looks like an explosion in reverse --

-- the next bomb in the chain **detonates**, and Johnny rockets up through it like a phoenix, drawing in more and more raw fire until he becomes **white hot** -- as, some miles above --

IN DOOM'S AIRSHIP - IN THE NANOLABORATORY LEVEL - **DOOM**

hears the distant but gigantic **EXPLOSIONS** -- and Doom knows something's terribly wrong -- he quickly moves away from Reed, to

THE LEVEL'S WINDOW - **GIGANTIC EXPLOSIVE FLASHES**

can be seen and heard coming from the hypercane's eye --

REED (O.S.)
I've got one regret too, Victor.
(beat)
That I have to imagine the look on your face.

Doom turns around, furious -- to see --

DOOM'S POV - **REED IS SPRINGING AT HIM**

from across the room for a renewed attack -- as we GO BACK --

INSIDE THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE - THE HUMAN TORCH BLASTS UP

in sequence through each fireball in the chain -- until --

AT THE TOP OF THE EYE - THE HUMAN TORCH

crests the top of a ten-mile column of flame, and he is still drawing in heat. The Torch has never looked more demonic -- at this point, he is a vaguely human shape in the midst of a dense, blinding white-hot fireball, but he is in perfect control --

-- as he reaches the top of the eyewall, Johnny's ascent halts -- he hovers atop the fire, still absorbing heat, until --

BEHIND THE WHITE-HOT BLAZE - JOHNNY'S FACE

can barely be seen, but we can see he's in excruciating pain -- this time, he can really feel the heat --

THE HUMAN TORCH GOES INTO NOVA FLAME

-- which is just what the name implies: it looks as if a small star were exploding, surging an incredibly intense omnidirectional sphere of plasma flame out, as a blinding white light FLARES --

HIGH ABOVE IN THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

is gaping at what's happening to her brother, but she's finally forced to shield her eyes against the blast beneath her --

OVER THE EYEWALL - THE NOVA FLAME BLASTS DOWN INTO THE STORM

entirely filling up the eye from top to bottom -- as --

THE TOP EDGE OF THE NOVA FLAME

jets up like a solar flare into the bottom of the airship -- the powerful flames **explode through the lower hull** like it was paper --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP'S LOWER LEVEL - THE NOVA FLAME

blasts through like a blowtorch, destroying the docking level and all the aircraft inside --

IN THE LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - **THE THING**

throws himself back from the blast -- it blazes through the floor and up to the ceiling -- and into

THE NANOLABORATORY LEVEL - DOOM AND REED

are continuing their struggle -- but the blast has rocked the airship, knocking them apart -- and --

-- the surging nova flame blasts through the floor in a powerful **explosion** that knocks Doom back --

-- as structural cracks form in the floor, Doom falls through one -- and Reed, weakened, starts to fall through another --

-- Reed catches himself before he goes through, but he's not able to pull himself up before the floor's crack collapses shut around his body -- Reed is very painfully trapped -- as --

IN THE NEW YORK CITY STREETS - THE HYPERCANE AND NOVA FLAME

can be seen from anywhere -- PANICKING CROWDS that were fleeing a second ago now halt, staring in amazement as the darkness breaks --

-- the **nova flame** high atop and inside the storm is blazing through the eyewall cylinder, searing the city with a white, bright light -- the spectators shield their eyes, as --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

is at a safe distance from the nova flame -- the heat is roasting her in the plane, but she's too busy staring down to notice --

SUE
Oh my God --

THE EYEWALL OF THE HYPERCANE IS RISING

and Johnny, still in a sphere of nova flame, is rising in synch above it, as if he were a god drawing it up after him. As predicted, the heat is making the storm stronger, but narrower -- as the eyewall is shrinking, it will soon **collapse into itself** --

ANGLE OVER DOOM'S AIRSHIP - OVER THE EYE

The nova's backblast has terminally damaged the scorched, smoking ship: its propulsion system is failing, and though it's two miles over the eye, the ship is going down as the eye is going up --

ATOP THE LENGTHENING EYEWALL - **JOHNNY**

is straining to maintain the flame -- but overcome, weak, he can't -- the nova flame **blasts one final surge of flaring, individual flames** shooting out in all directions -- and it suddenly, totally is extinguished --

-- as is Johnny, completely unconscious, **who falls toward the center of the hypercane's eye**, helpless. As he does --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

is far away, but she sees Johnny limply plummet into the storm --

SUE
(can't believe it)
-- no --
(won't let it happen)
-- **no** --

Sue dives the plane directly into the eye of the storm -- as --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - BEN CLIMBS UP THE WRECKED MIDDLE LEVEL

and we can see the whole thing is falling apart -- the nova flame punched an enormous hole straight up through every level, and what's left is riddled with fires and random explosions. Ben makes it up to the top level's wreckage -- and across the way, he sees --

BEN'S POV - THE NANOCHAMBER'S CONTROL COMPUTER

is fifty feet away on a part of the ship that is weakened by fire -- it will fall away in seconds, taking with it the **data cartridge** -- the only thing that can make Ben human again. But --

Ben's POV moves to the other side of the level -- Reed is trapped within the floor -- and a fire is about to spread to a tank filled with flammable chemicals -- Reed struggles, but doesn't see Ben.

CLOSE ON THE THING'S FACE

He only has time to rescue one. No one sees him, and no one will know what his choice was -- to give up his humanity, or his friend.

Ben decides -- and **he runs as fast as he can toward Reed** --

REED
(weak, but happy to see him)
-- Ben --

BEN
(light)
What happened, stretcho? Getcher tail caught in a crack?

With that, Ben **tears the floor open** around Reed, freeing him -- and pulling Reed out of the floor, Ben **runs across the level seconds before a gas-fed explosion immolates the spot** --

-- in a relatively safe spot, Reed and Ben catch their breath --

REED
-- Thanks, Ben --

Unnoticed by Reed, Ben looks off to the side of the level -- the segment with the nanocomputer controls, and the all-important cartridge, falls away from the ship as Ben watches blankly.

BEN
Don't mention it.
(looks around)
Now, if you tell me how we're gettin' offa this thing, we'll call it even.

LOOKING UP THE EYEWALL - A SCORCHED, UNCONSCIOUS JOHNNY

plunges into the lower part of the eye. The plane dives down fast, but it's being buffeted by the winds -- as the eyewall shrinks, so does the available flying space, and the lightning that veined the walls now flashes erratically **across** the inside of the walls --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE STRUGGLES WITH THE STICK

to keep the plane under control, out of the winds and out of the lightning. Unfortunately, all of the above is the **easy** part -- she's now within fifty yards of Johnny -- as she gets closer --

WITHIN THE EYE - THE FORCE FIELD PRISM

forms tantalizingly near Johnny, but breaks up -- Sue tries again, and misses again: both the plane and Johnny are being tossed by the winds, making aiming impossible --

-- though the ship has almost overtaken Johnny, they're both almost into the **water**: they're a thousand yards from impact --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

knows it's her last chance -- her face tenses with concentration --

WITHIN THE EYE - THE **FORCE FIELD EXTENDS**

out from the plane, and finally, successfully **forms a sphere around Johnny** -- and Sue retracts it, drawing Johnny in --

-- even as she has to maintain the field, she has to pull the plane up sharply, ending the dive a hundred feet over the water --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

fights the G force, the plane's limits, and her own concentration, as the plane pulls up --

Sue reaches down and throws open the hatch -- Johnny is below, in a force field sphere that looks like a fighter plane's belly-gun compartment. The field retracts to draw Johnny inside the plane --

-- the field drops Johnny in the seat -- and the seat SIZZLES with residual heat as Johnny comes to, groggy --

JOHNNY
(smiles weakly)
-- guess I really am a star now, huh?

ANGLE LOOKING UP EYEWALL - THE AMPHIPLANE

tracks straight up -- but they have miles to go through a shrinking gauntlet of **lightning** blazing across the eye -- while --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - BEN AND REED

try to maintain their footing -- the airship is falling apart, and the failing propulsion has put the whole thing into a spin --

-- and as Ben and Reed try to figure out what's next --

BACK IN THE SHADOWS OF THE WRECKAGE - DOOM

emerges, wavering and dazed, clutching a gun -- we can see that the explosion has destroyed some of his armor -- the jagged tears on it lightly ripple as the armor tries, and fails, to fully reform. We can see that **Doom's mask** has come off -- what we tantalizingly can't see yet is his **face**, hidden in the shadows.

DOOM
(bitterly)
So it ends as it began, Richards. Your treachery has, again, sent my dreams plunging to Earth. The difference is, this time you shall complete the journey with me.

OVER-SHOULDER SHOT BEHIND DOOM - BEN AND REED

are looking at Doom, who is approaching -- and we **still can't see Doom's face**, but Ben and Reed's surprise show they can --

DOOM
The world has been cheated of my rule -- but at least I shall not be denied this.

REED
(surprised)
Victor -- your face -- I never imagined --

With that, Doom freezes in his tracks, horrified -- he didn't realize his mask was gone. One hand gropes up to his face --

DOOM
(in horror)
My mask -- it's been destroyed --
(losing it)
My **face** --

Doom throws back his head -- he is standing directly underneath the thousands of mirrors that line the nano-chamber -- and --

DOOM'S POV - THOUSANDS OF REFLECTIONS OF HIS FACE SCREAM

back at him, and it is a nightmare worthy of Doom's soul-torn SHRIEK -- a monstrous, misshapen tapestry of not just burns and scar tissue, but also **layers of metal, wiring and silicon** --

DOOM
MY FAAAAACE --

UNDERNEATH THE NANOCHAMBER'S MIRRORS - DOOM

has dropped the gun to totally cover his face with his hands -- as he sinks to his knees, immobilized in total madness --

-- an **EXPLOSION** from underneath collapses the floor under him -- and Doom falls into the lower levels of the ship --

-- the blast burns through the tattered floor under Ben -- and it gives way under Ben's weight, dropping him one level down --

BEN FALLS ONTO A SEGMENT OF FLOOR

that precariously holds him above a surging inferno underneath him -- in a moment, he's going to plummet into it -- but --

-- Reed's hand stretches into view --

REED (O.S.)
(shouts down)
Take my hand!

Ben grabs it -- and as he does, Reed's foot stretches down --

REED (O.S.)
Now take my foot

Now Ben's confused, but he grabs it -- and as he does, Reed's upside-down head stretches into view, nose-to-nose with Ben, with an expression of life-or-death urgency on his face --

REED
Now grab my neck --

BEN
(explodes)
If this is your way of askin' for a kiss goodbye, you can forget it --

REED
(overlapping)
Just do it, you big lumm--

Reed is choked off in mid-sentence as Ben grabs his neck --

VIEW DOWN FROM TOP LEVEL OF AIRSHIP - REED'S TORSO BILLOWS OPEN

into a full-blown parachute that carries them upward, with Ben hanging on by Reed's arm, legs and neck -- they're blown up by the air rushing through the holes, as the ship falls around them --

-- the rushing wind, and thermal drafts from the fire, hurl Reed up with enough force that his body knocks an exit hole in the tattered remains of the roof, dragging Ben behind --

LONG SHOT VIEW OF AIRSHIP - AS IT PLUMMETS TOWARD THE EYE

-- Reed and Ben burst free out of the ship's top level --

ANGLE ON BEN DANGLING FROM REED/PARACHUTE

Reed's head stretches out from Ben's fist, to see that the plane is rocketing up toward them -- so Reed stretches his free arm -- it arcs around on itself in a forty-foot **loop** --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - FRONT VIEW OUT WINDSHIELD

Johnny and Sue can see the loop, above them and closing fast --

THE AMPHIPLANE FLIES INTO THE LOOP OF REED'S ARM

-- and as it does, Reed closes the loop around the tail of the plane, so that Reed and Ben are pulled along behind them --

-- Reed's face shows the shock of the velocity -- as his body is stretched out into a long strand instead of a parachute, he draws his body in, with Ben underneath, to catch up with the plane --

IN THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

looks out at the glass -- Reed has stretched his neck even with the windshield, and he mouths the words "open the hatch" -- as --

DOOM'S AIRSHIP FALLS INTO THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE

which has narrowed to almost nothing. As the remains of the airship swirl into the ferocious winds of the eyewall -- we SEE --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - CLOSE ON DOOM'S EYE

-- so close, we're in his pupil -- but we pull back until we can again see Doom's ruined, nightmarish face, as he stands, calmly waiting for the end that he knows is coming -- until --

THE AIRSHIP EXPLODES WITHIN THE NARROW EYE OF THE HYPERCANE

-- the **BLAST is swallowed within the collapse** of the eye -- as --

THE AMPHIPLANE STREAKS AWAY - THE FANTASTIC FOUR

look down at the collapsing core of the storm -- nothing is left but scattered rainclouds. Reed gathers up his arm, rubbing the soreness out of it, as Ben looks down at the cleared sky.

BEN
Not too shabby, rubberneck. Question is, what're we gonna do to top this?

Reed doesn't answer -- he looks over to Sue with a broad, exhausted grin. As the plane flies into the New York skyline, we --

CUT TO:

EXT. **FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - ATOP THE ROOF - A WEDDING**

is taking place here, amongst decorations and trellises set up for the occasion -- as about thirty watch from their seats --

AT A FRONT TRELLIS - ON A PLATFORM

-- the ceremony between Reed and Sue, in non-heroic but stunning wedding attire, draws to a close. Johnny is standing up for Sue, and Ben, the best man in an oversized but perfectly fitting morning suit, is struggling to fight back tears.

MINISTER
-- I now pronounce you man and wife.

The onlookers APPLAUD and CHEER -- and under the noise --

REED AND SUE

turn toward each other, quietly. Sue looks around at the surroundings, the building, and everything they've become --

SUE
(wryly)
So -- is this everything you dreamed of?

REED
No -- not quite yet --

A **force field** breaks over Sue's face to pull back her bridal veil.

REED
Now it is.

Reed leans in for a very long kiss -- and --

A MOMENT LATER - BACK IN THE CROWD

-- Ben rejoins Alicia -- and Johnny hooks up with Frankie. From the platform, Sue throws her bouquet --

-- and the bouquet is clearly, irrevocably on its way back toward Frankie and Johnny, neither of whom want it. Johnny quickly but surreptitiously raises his hand --

-- and he fires a wave of thermal energy at the bouquet. You can see the heat ripple in the air as it knocks the bouquet aside --

-- and directly into the hands of Alicia. Ben and Johnny share a look -- and a smile. And --

A MOMENT LATER - **JOHNNY FLIES OVER THE ROOF**

in his fire-retardant tux, ZINGING fireballs at a couple of television helicopters that have gotten too close. After a few near-misses, the copters clear out -- and --

THE FANTASTICAR BLASTS OUT OF THE "4" LAUNCHER

with Reed and Sue inside, heading toward a honeymoon instead of a holocaust for a change -- and as Johnny flies back down to the rooftop reception -- we --

FADE TO BLACK.